

INQUIRIES

The Magazine of Great Wickedness and Wonder

All new horror
fiction by:

Ray Bradbury

Douglas E. Winter

Wayne Allen Sallee
& H. Andrew Lynch

Nina Kiriki Hoffman

Steve Rasnic Tem

Part 2 of
Lansdale Raves!

Interview with
Richard Christian
Matheson

Autumn 1991
Vol. 1 No. 3
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Special Skipp & Spector Issue!

Inside:

Excerpt from *The Bridge* R.S. Hajji on *The Bridge*
FLEXI-DISC INSERT!: music from *The Bridge* soundtrack



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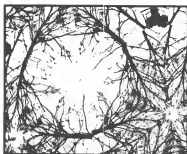
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Wickednotes

What a year this has been.

Witness the gradual erosion of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, leading to its complete destruction after the onslaught of the failed Russian Coup. The change was felt worldwide, and is the main reason for President Bush's decision to drastically reduce military arms in the U.S. Our country's change of policy toward the USSR in turn, will lead to a growth in the economy as more jobs open for the dismantling of nuclear arms. This in turn, will lead to a change in the way the US conducts its military; cutbacks will most likely take affect, both in personnel, as well as military spending. For people whose careers revolve around the military, this will be a drastic change as many will lose jobs, while the military as a whole will go through severe cutbacks. While the outlook seems bleak to some by way of job security, the change as a whole is for the better.

We witness change on the business front as well. This year alone saw several changes in our economy and the way we run business. The recession brought a change to job security and the way people handle their money. Winchell's Donut House was bought out by Pizza Hut. Security Pacific Bank is merging with Bank of America. That change will affect employees at both corporations. For some, the change will be for the better. For others...

Change is a familiar concept for fans of horror. We've witnessed Michael Landon change into a teenage Werewolf; we've seen Dr. Jekyll turn into Mr. Hyde; Jeff Goldblum grew thick hair, wings and antennae as he transformed into a six-foot five-inch fly. In fiction, we've seen Jack Torrance change from a struggling playwright/caretaker/husband and father to a leering maniac, haunted by the ghosts of the Overlook Hotel. On the business end of publishing, we've seen a change in the way major publishing companies publish and market their books; we've seen Pulphouse, the Hardback Magazine change into a bi-weekly magazine. We've seen Dell change the name of their horror line from Dell Horror to Dell/Abyss.

But change affects us on a more personal level, too. We witness the change of the seasons; Summer blends into Fall, the trees lose their color, wither and flake leaves onto the ground in dry piles. Fall's decaying touch brings way to Winter's biting cold. Winter gives way to Spring's rejuvenation. And then suddenly Summer is upon us and we wonder at how the time flies.

This same sense of wonder hits us as we witness the growth of our children. A child is born, becomes a wobbling, tottering infant, sprouts into a running, laughing, mischievous child and almost at once transforms into a teenager, facing a wave of conflicting emotions and changes in his, or her life. And as parents we wonder at the change, hoping that the tumultuous time they are going through now will be for the better.

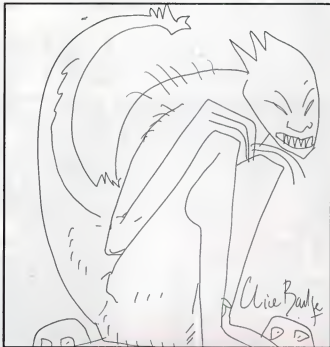
Change is to be expected, but what changes and when it does, is unpredictable.

And of course, we never know if it's for the better or worse until we've gone through it and faced the reality of the transformation.

Following the trend of changes that have occurred this year in world politics, economics, and sociological perspectives, we've followed suit and changed the contents of this issue. Originally advertised as containing work by Mick Garris and a KNB feature by David J. Schow, we've changed the format (not knowing we would be) by replacing them with an excerpt from THE BRIDGE by John Skipp and Craig Spector, Bob Hajdi's perspective, a music biography, and a FLEXI-DISC with a cut from THE BRIDGE SOUNDTRACK. And note we've changed our address, again. We're fairly confident that this change is for the better, but the results of our decision have yet to make themselves known. Our only hope is that we are better prepared for the possibility of change when it comes up again. The brain tumors are healing nicely, thank you.

After all, we wouldn't want to change from the charming, adorable, lovable publishers we are to pustulating, slime seething, tumor ridden, screaming maniacs with bad attitudes, now would we?

Anybody out there got a tranquilizer?



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BLACK SUN

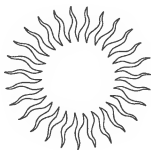
by
Douglas E. Winter

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I did everything, everything I wanted to
I let them use you for their own ends
To the center of the city in the night
Waiting for you...
-- Joy Division

Illustrations by
Steven Bissette

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Night had wounded time. Minutes bled into hours, hours into days, and after a while there was only this dark country, wet with grey. Somewhere in the distance was the city; somewhere in the distance was the dawn. But here and now was night, and the stranger, and the coffin that he carried; and here and now, and forever, were the dead.

The stranger knew them all, not by name or date or place of birth, but by the stories that their broken bodies told. The first of them had been crucified, his limbs pierced and twisted in an ecstasy of pain. Crowned not with thorns, but needles and nails, he cried silently to the science that had forsaken him. At his feet lay his mourners, wrists and ankles bound, heads caved in with bricks and rifle butts. To each side hung those most innocent of thieves, slender and freshfaced girls with hair the color of flax, their naked torsos wrapped in wire and skewered on splintered stakes.

He knew the dead and their makeshift-Golgotha, just as he knew the city that shined on brightly somewhere in this darkness, the next destination on the long low road from the Deluge to Jericho, Carthage to Calcutta, Auschwitz to Babi Yar, My Lai to Jonestown: The stations of the cross of human suffering. Parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife, the martyrs gathered like flies on the shadowed corpse of history.

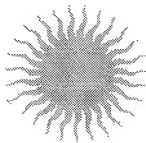
The stranger knew them and believed in them, not the god in whose image they had been made. A lank scarecrow cloaked in black hat and coat and boots, he seemed to have walked this road for eternity. His face was blistered and unshaven; his eyes parched furrows, the eyes of one who has seen and not forgotten.

Dust swam in vague circles around him; the fading wind whipped the long coat like a cape, showed the holsters at his hips. A rope coiled in his gloved right fist, the noose by which he dragged the wooden coffin, its lid scarred with a childlike cross and the name of no one.

Now that the dead had spoken, his journey was complete. He loosed the rope from his grip, took the shovel from his pack. By the time he finished digging, the man from the city had come for him, just as he had promised: Alone. A flashlight beamed from his left hand; no weapons could be seen. His name was Hagopian, and when he spoke, his whisper was chased by the wind, the swift slash of a blade.

"In this world," Hagopian said, "there are two kinds of people." The flashlight burned up into his face, showed eyes restless and blue, teeth bared in a fêret's smile. "Those with loaded guns . . . and those who dig."

The stranger dropped the first handful of dirt onto the coffin, snug in its shallow grave. "The only kind of people I see are the dead."



This is the room, the start of it all: A confessional of concrete and steel, lit in the unholy silver of halogen. Glass shards were scattered like diamonds underfoot. Stains seeped through the ceiling, desperate angels whose tears were tainted water.

The control center was unmanned, silent, still: Blank computer screens and video monitors. Dials and digital displays that had died at redline. Clocks winding down in ever slower circles.

"No words can explain what happened." Hagopian tapped the first of the video displays, and life was born in dull shades of grey: A view down deep inside, where slowly turned the grinding wheels, the mighty turbines of tomorrow and tomorrow. The technicians, robed in the white frocks of their priesthood, scurried back and forth, laboratory mice lost in a maze of corridors. "What went wrong?"

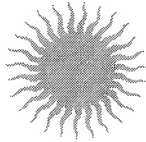
The stranger did not ask, or answer.

"A mistake, some said." Hagopian activated the next monitor, and the unblinking eye of another camera peered into a roomful of cadavers, laid out like fallen dominoes. "Accidents do happen." A third monitor flickered, offered a glimpse into a watery abyss where two workers, doomed golems in cowls and contamination suits, floated in exile. "Or was it sabotage?" Screen after screen winked awake, a chiaroscuro of the dead and the dying. "Could it have been planned? Intended? Expected? What should we believe, my friend?"

All the king's horses, all the king's men.

"In the end, only we can choose. Truth... or the last set of lies?"

"No," the stranger said. "Only the most recent ones."

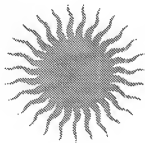


There was light in the distance, a bright hot star that pierced the horizon: The city.

Hagopian led him back into the darkness, past the broken barricades, the body bags, the guards who coughed blood onto the backs of their hands. The great grey domes rose behind them like inverted mushroom clouds, a monument to last the ages.

Through the wire screen, the faces of those standing outside, heedless of the circled triads and words of warning: Faces pressed against the cage of an endangered breed. A bentbacked crone stumbled away from them, a bouquet of torn newspapers and milk cartons held tightly to her breast. She licked at the missing fingers of her left hand and went on her way, following the dirt track that wound down into the valley below, into the sprawl of tents, abandoned vehicles, shelters made of raw lumber and tin siding and cardboard boxes. There pockets of flame and huddled people waited for a new messiah.

"That's it," Hagopian told him. "The cancer colony."



This is the car, at the edge of the road: A Land Rover, hidden in the ruins of a collapsed overpass, metallic blue turned red with rust. A body, unsexed by decay and the teeth of scavengers, stretched across the hood, spikes driven through its forehead and hips.

Hagopian gestured with the flashlight. "This is the way... step inside." The gears shrieked, caught, and the tires churned mud and sand as the Land Rover took to the road. The dead traveled with them: At every turn lay the young and the old, limbs withered with disease, bellies swollen with starvation, butchered and burned and bullet-torn. At intervals, trucks and railcars gasped out payloads of human remains; bulldozers stood watch over gaping ditches where the bodies were heaped like slag, the grey waste of industry.

Soon the stranger's mirrorshades were awash with dancing phantoms, the backlit afterimages of blasted souls. A blonde giantess smiled down on him, cigarette in hand, inviting unknown pleasures. Beyond the monstrous billboard, the city rose from the darkness, a phoenix of bright concrete and glass.

An imaginary morning. A daydream. Or a dream of day.

"Here in the central grid, lighting is, shall we say... encouraged." Hagopian laughed. "And why not? The power supply is unlimited." There seemed no end to his laughter.

The Land Rover was drawn like an insect to the light: The storefronts, apartment towers, hotels, government buildings, all vacant and broken facades, were alive with light, an

urban furnace stoked to white heat. The streets were colored with neon: yellow and pink, blue and green, an artificial inferno that flamed through the center of the city. Searchlight crisscrossed the sky; floodlights, arrayed in lofty banks, beamed down in every direction. Light, and only light, so bright that even the shadows had melted.

Hagopian brought the Land Rover to a stop and fisted open the door. The air was alive with the scent of ozone, the hum of unseen generators. He loomed off into the flaring sodium, lit, unlit, then lit once more, oblivious to the strewn garbage, the burned out hulks of automobiles, the words, black and spraypainted, along a nearby wall: CARSICK NOMADS.

The stranger followed. Overhead a streetlight blinked its yellow eye, watching over an intersection empty save for the headless corpse of a baby, sprawled in the gutter like a discarded toy. Its blood tattooed the pavement, slicked the bottom of his boots.

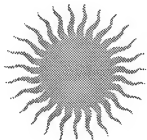
A shot echoed through the neon canyons, then the tread of marching feet, growing ever louder; finally came the voices, a fragile chorus of lost and unheeded words. "Is this a dream we share?" "And the children . . . what about the children?" "They keep calling me . . . calling me." Down the brightly lit boulevard shuffled a procession of ashen women and men, their heads bent, wearing torn hospital gowns and the shame of imagined crimes. Their shepherds sported black hoods and flak jackets, waved their rifles like righteous celebrants. "Can you see?" An elderly woman stumbled from the line, wide-eyed with rapture. She beckoned the stranger to gaze into the processed sky. "Can you see them? The blue and the wind, the blue wind." She staggered backward, falling into the arms of the nearest of the gunmen. "Who was I?" she cried at him, her fingers like claws on his jacket. "It was ages ago." Now she was screaming. "And you, then . . . who were you?"

The gunman pushed her away, brought the barrel of his rifle into her stomach. Then he backed her against a wall and shot her; another red stain.

The procession moved on, burned scraps of paper carried on the wind; on and on, toward the edge of the city.

"Her name is Karen," the stranger said.

"We know that, too." Hagopian stepped past the latest body, gesturing down the boulevard and into the high noon of night.

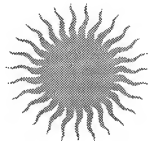


In a room on the third floor of a shattered, nameless hotel, the stranger drank schnapps from a dirty soup bowl. Neon pulsed its peacock flare against the walls, the mirror, the straightbacked chair on which he sat. Although his eyes were closed, he felt

the relentless pattern of light, the cold and the warm, against his face. An uncovered mattress lay in the middle of the room, its only other furnishing. On the mattress he had placed his two pistols, countless clips of ammunition, a flare gun, and a stack of wrinkled photographs and news clippings.

After a time he dealt the pictures onto the floor, in the crux of the Tarot: The happy family. Smiling child. Detroit. Chelyabinsk. Idaho Falls. Byelolarsk. Leningrad. Three Mile Island. Webbers Falls. Chernobyl.

The city: Where the dream, brighter than a thousand stars, had never ended.



At the knock on the door, his pictures were forgotten; in their place were memories, sketched in fading colors, gone grey.

"Yes."

The word was barely spoken; then she was inside. Her face was masked in shadow, but her body, tall and frail, burned with the bright pulse of neon. A sille blouse, tattered and torn, hung in loose folds from her bent shoulders. The black vinyl skirt was slit high on her hips. Her stockings, fishnet black, were holed and held to her emaciated legs by rubber bands. One shoe was white, scuffed and unheeled, the other red; she looked like a lost gypsy child playing dress-up.

The stranger saw her, saw the other her, raven hair dancing in the sun, her golden skin and coral lips and emerald eyes, now faded. Nearly gone.

"Karen."

She came out of the shadows and to his side: Face averted, arms rigid, bone-thin poles that fell to clenched and shaking fists. Her head seemed too heavy for her to raise. She looked up at him from the corners of her fugitive eyes. A snake of pain burrowed in her cheek.

His hands reached out, took her, steadied her.

"Karen."

She recoiled from his touch, and his hands fell away. He watched as she unbuttoned the torn blouse, let it slide from her sunken shoulders and onto the floor. She wore no bra; the chipped ruby nail of her index finger traced the pale scars of her dual mastectomy.

He brushed back her thinning hair, saw the skull so close beneath the skin, the indecipherable scrawl of sutures at her brow and throat and neck. She sighed as he raised her head, looked into her eyes, lips parting expectantly. Then she tried to speak, nothing more than a gasp, her eyes tightening into slits, fighting tears as again her head dropped.

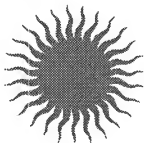
"Karen," he said, louder this time. He lifted her head with both hands, leaning in and kissing her, lips gently



"IL SOLE NERO"

opening her tongueless mouth.

In time, he drew her down onto the mattress. The neon flickered and flared, casting imaginary days and nights across them as they made love in the heart of the city.



Black wing on white sky: A bird of prey, taking flight, then falling, blurred, gone in a wave of hands. His fists tightened into a chrysalis, fingers opening to spawn a butterfly, closing again to crush it. A stick man struggled into focus, stood and walked, only to fall, to stand, to fall again.

Shadowplay: The light and the dark, and his hands in between, slowly moving in the air, creating life and then destroying it; with his hands. His own hands.

"She's gone."

Clouds fell; faces changed. His hands clutched at empty air. The wall of the vandalized lobby went black as the night outside: The shadow of the stranger.

"Back to where she belongs." Hagopian's fingers bent into legs, mimed a fractured dance. "Somewhere... over the rainbow." He brought the keys to the Land Rover from his back pocket, shook them once, twice, as if taunting a sleepy cat.

"It's time, isn't it? Time for one last ride."

The shadow walked across the ceiling, black hat and coat and boots, and then there was no light, no shadow, at all. The stranger took the keys and went out into the night.

When at last the light returned to the white wall, whose cracks were ever-widening, the black wings took flight again.

Hagopian called after him, a statement, not a question: "You know what to do."



Through the countless corridors, a pistol in each hand, the stranger walked and killed, reloaded, then walked and killed again. The guards died first, then the white-coated technicians and the laborers and anyone else who stood in his way. Once he was shot, through the flesh of the arm; he tied the wound off with a rag and kept on walking and killing. His bullets were

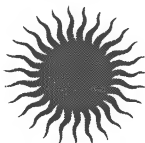
spent in ones and twos, finding chests and heads and anointing them in red. Soon there was no one left to kill.

Outside, in the valley beyond the great grey domes, the flames coursed hungrily over the cancer colony. The stranger returned there, promises to keep. When finally his pistols were emptied, he cast them aside, and walked on until he found the last of the ragged tents, the final offering to the fires born of his hand.

She lay there on a blanketed tabletop, as shrunken and silent as a stillborn child. Above her the canvas roof had been torn away, and her eyes, frozen in agony, dared the starless sky.

The stranger watched as her lips, as if on cue, moved in a halting effort to form the words he had whispered to her an hour before: "At... dawn... At dawn."

The stranger kissed her one last time, and returned to the Land Rover, knowing, as he had known with his first glimpse of the city, that it would not end here.



Another room, its door unlocked, where Hagopian sat in silent contemplation before a mirror circled with brass sunsigns. In time, his reflected eyes met those of the stranger.

"I was not expecting you so soon." He tapped his forearm, found the vein, his face sharpening as he plunged the needle in. A sigh, a loss of focus; then strangeness so hard to reflect.

"You really are early, my friend." The spent hypodermic rolled along the tabletop, past the vials, the bottles, the pills, the hollow hope of AD20 and laetrile; it came to rest against a thick paper envelope.

"It's not early."

Hagopian opened the envelope, drew out the dollars, caressed their green skin. Finally he counted them, one after another, onto the table: Payment in full.

"It's late. Too late."

"Won't you wait for morning?"

"Morning has passed." The stranger reached for the dollars, clutched a fistful in his right hand; then he let them drop back onto the table, fallen leaves beneath a warm red rain. "And noon." He brushed the long coat from his hip. "And now it is night... for the city."

"And the assassin is also a poet." Hagopian laughed. "Had I known that when I hired you..."

The laughter was done. Hagopian looked at himself, not the stranger, in the mirror.

"Tell me one thing, stranger..." He spun the chair around. "Is there death after life?"

The stranger's left hand rose in slow motion. The

mirror shined back a rainbow arc: blue steel. His trigger finger squeezed imperceptibly and the flare gun exploded into Hagopian's face.



This is the tomb, the end of it all: The place of the skull, the passion of another savior, the alpha and the omega. The beginning, and the end, and the stranger.

The long night was nearly over. Fires raged in the east, a false aurora, at a place where no one would go to extinguish them. Beyond them the city shined on brightly, quite insane.

His shovel bit into dirt, bit again, until at last he struck wood. Soon the coffin was freed from its resting place. His patient hands traced the name of no one that had been cut into its lid. With the knife from his boot, he jimmied out nail after nail, then pulled the groaning lid away.

From his shirt pocket he took the first key. Metal clicked on metal; the key twisted in a quarter-circle and

stopped. Numbers. Sequences. Red went yellow, then green.

A sound rose in the distance, slow thunder that sped into a sudden storm of wings. Over the burning horizon soared a great grey mantis, rushing through cloud and shadow to the new Golgotha.

He popped a smoke grenade and tossed it onto the tarmac, a balefire plumed in red. Then he reached for the second key.

Soon the helicopter floated over him, churning dust and crimson smoke and reanimating the dead, who shook and shuddered like stringcut puppets in its wake. As the rush of wind tore at him, the stranger slid the second key into the coffin. His hat spun away, showing a sudden smile; a scythe.

"It is finished," he said, for no one; for everyone. Like the spinning rotors of the helicopter, the clocks were running.

The stranger rose from the grave, his arms outstretched, raised high, hands open, as the beam of the helicopter's searchlight found him, circled him, caught him. In a ray of golden light, he was taken up into the heavens.

Ten years: ten hours: ten minutes: ten seconds. Time healed as in silence the numbers counted backward toward zero.

And at dawn, the black sun would rise over the neon city that had finally learned how to die.

*in memory of Corbucci and Leone
and for Gary Stein*

Douglas E. Winter has recently returned home -- literally, and to horror fiction -- after spending two years in Detroit as an attorney in one of the longest jury trials in American history. Critic, reviewer and one-time dance partner of *Iniquities* own Buddy Martinez, he is the author of *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness* (1984), editor of the award-winning anthology *Prime Evil* (1988), and purveyor of an increasing number of strange short stories, of which he counts "Black Sun" among his favorites. His forthcoming books include a novel (he's been saying that for years) and a biographical critique of his friend Clive Barker.



Richard Christian Matheson

by Anya Martin

From advertising copywriter to TV scriptwriter. From parapsychologist to producer. From rock 'n' roll drummer to one of the acclaimed masters of the horror short story. At 37, Richard Christian Matheson has just completed his first novel, *Created By*, a probing Hollywood thriller due out in hardcover next year from Doubleday. The first 80 pages of *Created By* drew an auction and six-figure advance. Rights to it are selling at history-making figures overseas and Clive Barker calls it a "...masterly fable of devastating effect." He's co-executive producing a major horror film, *Red Sleep*, with Mick Garris from a script co-written with Garris which sold for a reported \$750,000.

Red Sleep is Matheson's sixth massive sale of a screenplay written on speculation reportedly sold for half a million or more. Among those purchased: one was grabbed by Steven Spielberg, another by Richard Donner. Matheson continues to sell more and is looking at directing one of his own original scripts which he's executive producing within the next year or two. He has been approached by Warner Bros. to adapt Stephen King's *THE STAND*, by NEW LINE to adapt Robert McCammon's *MINE* and is currently writing a huge budget actioner for Badham/Coenen at Universal. He's also one of the Supervising Producers on a new CBS sit-com, *TEECH* and recently wrote a *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* which aired in August. A new batch of short stories will appear in six upcoming anthologies and he has a story in *YEAR'S BEST HORROR*. He is also about to publish an untitled second collection which will feature twenty stories. He's also a songwriter and one of his songs was just released on album and CD by the group *OUTRIDER*.

Yet Matheson still finds time to travel, go to movies, windsurf, and play



Beth Gwinn

the drums.

Anya Martin recently talked to Matheson not just about how he manages to juggle his time, but also about the joys and horrors of Hollywood, the sources of darkness in his own childhood, why he was recently in Las Vegas, and a mysterious paranormal ritual he witnessed in Brazil—a behind-the-scenes look into the life of the modern Renaissance man of the horror field.

Anya Martin: *Why did you name the novel Created By?*

R. C. Matheson: It's the possessory tiara for people who devise television series. It's flashed on screen at a show's beginning to indicate its parent. It also has meanings beyond that in describing the book's theme.

Martin: *I've heard that the book is full of satire.*

Matheson: Yes, but not broad assault. It's more insidious; has a point of view. **Martin:** Now, is it a horror novel? Or is it a horror novel by what we conceive to be the conventional definition of a horror novel?

Matheson: If your definition is broad, it could qualify. But it also qualifies as suspense or a thriller. The violence, or horror, is fairly tame by the standards of most powerful horror novels. It doesn't owe its strength to a graphic approach.

Martin: What would you say is the strength of your novel?

Matheson: My characters are not just glitz puppets. Also, no one has set a major horror novel in Hollywood or the television business. And no other horror writer has my background in television. I was a writer/producer for 12 years, and there's nothing in the book I didn't experience.

Martin: Would you say then that the book is to some extent autobiographical?

Matheson: The people and manners are a kind of an impressionistic diary.

Martin: You've developed a reputation for extremely tight, closely focused prose, for being the master of the short short story. Was it a liberation to work on a novel, to be spread across a broader canvas, use language in a more expansive way?

Matheson: Yes. Although most of those limitations I placed on myself. I don't really see that the novel is a more leisurely form or the short story has to be as rigorous a form as I've made it. That said, I consciously made a decision to work with a language-speed suitable to the subject matter. The style is one of the things which I think makes the book. The writing itself is a character and comes with journalistic serrations and distance. If there is a sound to a book, a kind of regional tonality and tempo, mine is Hollywood. I tried to capture the Prozac steeplechase.

I'm told my writing is always filled with images but with *Created By I* took it to the edge. I decided that was going to be as much a painting as a novel.

Martin: Will people who have read your short stories be surprised to see the style you've adopted in your novel?

Matheson: So much of what I do in Hol-

lywood--so much of how I've made a living out here--has been as a comedy writer; a writer of dark satire. Besides a few of my stories, I doubt you'd get that from my prose work. But the novel is very satiric. It's a side of my thinking that may surprise some.

Martin: Will you reveal something about the plot?

Matheson: It's about a writer/producer who creates the most successful television series in the history of the medium and how it destroys his life, then restores it. It has a supernatural angle. From another point of view, it's a psychologically layered study of a nervous breakdown taken into the flesh. It's also a chronicle of ambition as plague. That's the moralistic overlay.

The book also deals with the personal awareness the main character reaches; how he realizes that ultimately Hollywood is innocent. I'm convinced, in all our lives, ultimately there are no guilty places. All are equally amoral. We often mistake our experience in a place as being descriptive of the place itself. Whether it's the literal place or a figurative state.

Martin: How long is the book?

Matheson: About 400 manuscript pages.

Martin: And how long did it take you to write it?

Matheson: The first 90 pages, which launched the auction, were written in two months. And the rest has taken me two and a half years, bearing in mind that I also had 10 movies and 7 pilots to write and had a variety of other writing and producing responsibilities. If I actually subtracted the time other projects took, I'd say six months.

Martin: Did you find it frustrating with all these other projects. Did you have to leave the book for long periods of time and return to it?

Matheson: There were times when I was enmeshed in some aspect of it and I was sorry I had to jump out for a week or two. But if it's really working, you jump back in quickly. My writing methods are such that I jump in and out of everything. And I bring whatever I'm currently suffused in with one project to another. Everything crosses over. With a first book, I think it's smart to take as long as you want, given certain realities. The first novel sets much in motion, in

terms of reputation that's hard to correct if launched the wrong way. If you blow it, it's going to take years to correct. It's not worth wasting that first shot if you don't have to.

Martin: Was your editor, your publisher understanding about the period of time, or was that up front from the beginning?

Matheson: We never talked about it. They knew everything I was doing in my L.A. career was only adding to what I was writing about. One of the things about the book that made it exciting to them was that it is about a subject which I know a tremendous amount about. I'm writing about customs and a certain behavioral accent that you must be exposed to to become fluent. When I talk to other writers I know, unless they live and function in Hollywood, they often misunderstand what's going on out here. An obvious example is they're semi-convinced the reason many films are bad is because development executives are stupid. They're not. If they were, they wouldn't be dangerous.

Martin: Would you go into what you mean by "dangerous"?

Matheson: They are in positions of meaningful leverage, however devoid of taste they may be. In any given situation, depending on their exact station at a studio or a production company, whether sniper, Mikado or usher their vote can influence your project's fate. They are dangerous because they are the gatekeepers and have their own ideas about things. And almost to a person, they are articulate and quick-minded. To trivialize them only hurts your own efforts. It's like dealing with a complicated child. If you want them to cooperate, you must out think them.

Beyond that, they are dangerous because the stakes of the whole game are very high. As a result, Hollywood is a town rife with soft treachery, invisible deals. There's much mixed meaning behind what's evident. Again, if you dismiss it and say, "well, these people are vapid," or "they're greedy narcissists," you won't get what you want. As a general philosophy, I believe in trying to find the place of unity between two people not the place of separation.

Martin: What else can you say about



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« *Hollywood. The Business end of it?*

Matheson: It's collaboratively oriented. Studios with distributors; producers with directors; everyone shares an oxygen mask with everyone else. Though ultimately many die of asphyxiation. It's not a business where an adversarial approach works well, or where absolute sovereignty is possible. There's too much money involved in costs and profits. The minute you have huge figures on the table, votes mount. Books are different. I mean, using an elementary example, Zebra can buy a book for a couple grand or less. With a few safe multiples of that, they can send it out there, and still make their money. By comparison, that cumulative amount would barely cover: Writer's Guild minimum on a story for a teleplay or screenplay. It wouldn't even cover the cost of the union electrician who handles the cables on the set for one week. It would barely cover fees on an animation script. Making T.V. shows and movies is very expensive, and the minute you've got that level of financial investment, you've got a tremendous amount of paranoia. Reward and punishment, of a massive sort, come overnight in Hollywood. It becomes a template for madness.

Martin: What's the current status of

Red Sleep, the vampire film you co-wrote with Mick Garris?

Matheson: John Landis is no longer on the project. Things are in flux.

Martin: Are you predicting that it will be produced?

Matheson: We're anticipating that it will be set up any time now.

Martin: Do you have anyone definitely associated with it—producer, director, actors?

Matheson: Mick and I are the executive producers. Most recently, Hollywood Pictures—a studio within Disney—wants to make it. We're talking to a variety of directors. And Robert de Niro has expressed interest in starring.

Martin: I was going to ask you about that.

Matheson: He's an interesting choice. I don't know if he would be the ideal. On a certain level, you hear the name and you say, "well, that's good enough for me. Book him." But if you actually think it through, in some cases he was not the ideal actor for certain roles. Although he's always great, he may not be the ideal choice for certain films.

Martin: I understand that the plot deals with vampirism from the perspective of bloodlust as a metaphor for substance abuse.

Matheson: Yes.

Martin: Has the plot evolved and changed with the various delays on the project or is it still very much on that same level?

Matheson: One of the things that got changed in the rewrite that John [Landis] did was that aspect. It got dropped. I have heard from my studio executive sources they lost interest in the project because of that. The good news is that it looks to me like we're just going to return to our original draft.

Still, your question has a universal appeal because with every film project, if you give it enough time, it will change into some-

thing different. Simply by the sheer effect of salaried, executive input; the obligatory comments from the executives suite. They're paying a lot of money to these people, so they have to have notes on your material, even if they bought it for a ton of money. One of the sensitivities that writers must develop in Hollywood is intuiting when notes make sense and when they don't. A lot of what I do is I take meetings, and I listen to what people think about stuff that they want me to write, about stuff that they want me to rewrite, stuff I've written. You have to develop a sense of real fairness in your mind, a system of justice as to how you deal with input.

What I try to do with it is digitalize it, break it down, analyze it. I don't take it personally because it's not intended that way. The fact that you're in the office and they're paying you means their opinion of you is high. What happens from that point forward is not personal.

That's one of the things that is hard for people to understand, particularly writers who are giving their all, really putting their heart on paper. If somebody doesn't like what they're doing, it's very painful. It's a bit like being in a relationship with someone. You have

to be able to hear what that other person feels about you and try to not personalize it. You have to understand that it's an extension of their own universe. It's not necessarily a personal assessment of you. That is part of the system of navigating.

Martin: *You've been talking about the pressures that you're potentially under in terms of workload and dealing emotionally with people that you're working with. How do you handle it when the pressure gets really, really high and you feel like you need to relax, need to get away. What do you do? Do you take off for a period of time, have some particular strategy, or do you just swallow it and keep working?*

Matheson: When I'm so agitated that my impulse is to leave, that's usually the time when I can accomplish the most. It's times like that when I move things along meteorically, when I make large leaps that are really valuable.

But there's another point I get to, not when I'm stressed out but when I am well beyond stress that is toxic. There's a place beyond stress where you malfunction. When I malfunction, that's when I stop. Stress is just a given. I don't even think about it. What I'm on the alert for is when function begins to weave. In some cases, all you need is some sleep. It depends on how your mind works. I go to my beach house and just watch the waves for a day or two. Read. Try to get lots of sleep.

Martin: *You were just in Las Vegas?*

Matheson: Right. Aside from *Red Sleep*, I'm producing a picture I wrote for Fox, which I may also direct. Half of it takes place in Vegas so I was trying to get a feel for some locations.

Martin: *Is it horror also?*

Matheson: No. It's more like a Neil Simon movie.

Martin: *What do you do for fun?*

Matheson: Travel. Go to movies and concerts. My sense of fun tends to be when what's happening internally is stimulated, challenged--so I'm not really a person who white water rafts, stuff like that. I much more enjoy a good conversation.

But I'm up for anything. I guess what I do for fun is just change the pace. It could be bowling, scuba diving.

And the speaking tours that I

do with Dave and John and Craig are fun for me. We just travel around back East and do lectures.

Martin: *You've been touring colleges.*

Matheson: Right.

Martin: *How many have you done so far?*

Matheson: A few. This October, we're booked into 10 or 15. We do them quickly, in a week and a half. They pay us a lot of money, and it just basically gives us an excuse to hang around together and laugh a lot.

Martin: *Do you draw large audiences?*

Matheson: Depends. In some places, no, few people show up. Still, if you talk for an hour, they have to pay you two or three thousand dollars. We went to one place where the gig came together at the last second and they hadn't publicized it, and I think fifteen people showed up. It was comical. Yet we got paid a fortune which only added to the velocity of our fun. We blew out of town that night like bank robbers.

In other cases, the audiences were considerable--maybe two hundred people. This tour will be much more that way.

Martin: *Do you still get time to play the drums?*

Matheson: Every day. I was in a band last year. It was all a bunch of guys like me who were busy film guys--directors, producers. But we all missed playing a lot. We got together a few times, had a great time, but it didn't pan out. All of us got busy at the same time. But I love to play. It's part of what I use to structure all the different stuff that is running around inside of me.

Martin: *Do you have a favorite band right now? Is there a musician that just excites you?*

Matheson: Lots of groups and individual players. I listen to some music just for the musicality of it, or the lyrics. In other cases, I listen to the musician's idea process. For example, I love to listen to Steve Gadd, who's one of the best drummers around. He always puts groups together that are really interesting, but he's always extremely interesting.

I've likened drumming to writing before. What it really comes down to is the instinctive division of an idea. What do you do with one sentence?

What do you do with a paragraph? What do you do with an observation? How do you break it up? And it's fascinating to hear how really superb musicians or prose stylists break it up. A really great drummer has a way of dividing time into unexpected rhythms or syncopations. As a drummer, I can't help but have that carry over into my writing.

I listen to Concrete Blonde, the LA's. I just got the new Crowded House album, and I like it a lot. Steve Vai. I just got "The Best of the Bonzo Dog Band" and the new Lenny Kravitz album. Simply Red. L.A. Vampires. Hooters. The Rembrandts. I like the Smithereens. I like that Donald Fagen/Beatles blend.

Martin: *I understand that you love animals. Do you have any pets?*

Matheson: I have a cat. When I grew up at my parents' ranch, at one point we had 13 horses, nine or 10 cats, five dogs, ducks, chickens, turtles, crows. I've been around animals my whole life. The reason I don't have more animals is my schedule. I can't be around animals as much as I'd like to because I just can't be there to take care of them often enough. I'd love to have tons of animals.

Martin: *How old were you back when you were living with all these animals?*

Matheson: Ten to twenty.

Martin: *So you didn't grow up in an urban-suburban section of L.A., you were in a rural area.*

Matheson: Well, it was an upscale rural area, what they call a "mink and manure" community--doctors and celebrities who want to be cowboys. There was no crime. It was like living in the country, and it was very far out of Los Angeles. It was a great place to grow up. My parents had a house that was on the edge of thousands of acres of total wilderness.

Martin: *And where was this?*

Matheson: 40 miles north of Los Angeles.

Martin: *You've described your childhood as very basic, not all that extraordinary. Obviously your father was a major influence, but how did a boy from a neighborhood as nice as yours end up with such a fascination with darkness?*

Matheson: Let me get to that in a second. I think the reason I ended up doing what I'm doing is because I was permitted to have endless imagination and place

no limits on it. That's the reason that I'm a writer; that I write in so many different styles and media.

Why my imagination is drawn to things that are dark is more personal. Although my family life was very happy with much laughter and love—my own experience with my peers as a kid was traumatic. When I say I had a happy childhood, I had a happy childhood as long as I was home. But the minute I was anywhere else, there were some things that happened that were very difficult and very hurtful. I think that was probably what led to it.

The honest answer is that I was a very hurt kid. I'm sure the experiences that I went through generated a lot of fear. And I think we are drawn as adults into systems, in my case writing horror, that help relieve irresolutions from childhood. Those systems are sometimes healthy, sometimes not. If your mother beat you and she died, you might marry a man that beats you so you could find a way to complete the journey with your mother. As adults, so much of our private world, so many decisions we make, are childhood issues by extension or indirection.

It's fascinating when you ask people about their childhood, you quickly understand why they are doing what they are doing, why they are in an unhappy marriage, why they are in a career that they love or hate, why they are succeeding or failing. You get the paradigm; the tributaries that led to who they are. In my case, if my own theory has substance, I'm trying to work some of that stuff through, via my work.

By comparison, *Created By*, unlike much of my short fiction, is a working through of things that happened in my adult life, not childhood. But the issues that began to surface at the end of the book—what made it most interesting to me and where I was really exploring what the book

was about—were issues of childhood.

Martin: *Do you want to talk about any of these experiences?*

Matheson: No.

Martin: *When you were a child, did you have other career aspirations—cowboy, astronaut?*

Matheson: I wanted to be a magician, and moving directly from that, a talk-show host. And at one point, I wanted to be a stand-up comedian. I think the theme of all of it was misdirection; entertainment, but via a very specific form of manipulation of time and space.

What's interesting to me is that Johnny Carson was a drummer and a magician. Dick Cavitt had been a magician and became a talk-show host. Arsenio Hall was a magician, wanted to be a talk-show host, and also plays the drums. An amazing number of people in comedy play the drums. I find it intriguing that these guys all had a fascination with magic and with being talk-show hosts. It seems what those two things have in common is a kind of theatricalized control.

Martin: *What's the most fascinating, exciting place you've ever visited. And what dream trip would you like to take someday?*

Matheson: The most fascinating place I've ever been—I wrote about it in the

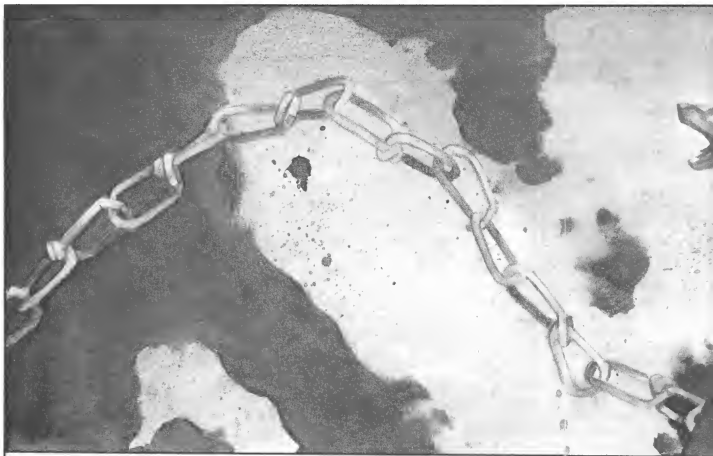
novel—was a ceremony I was at outside of Rio de Janeiro in which allegedly I saw the dead rise and I ate human flesh. I could say more but won't.

South America is a place that lingers darkly in my mind. I think it's the shamanistic blend of primal, spiritual and magical. There is something there that transcends rules of physics. They've also got some very fascinating ideas about mortality and religion ranging from the almost whimsical to the rather morbid. Certain parochialized concepts of death are odd. I visited because I was involved with a Brazilian woman whose family was caught up in spiritual rituals. I saw a lot of very, very strange things.

Martin: *Where would you like to be with your work, your life in five years?*
Matheson: Writing, directing, creating t.v. series and moving on. Also writing plays. I'd like to be a critically and commercially successful novelist. I may or may not have an interest in running a studio. I could see plunging into it and doing it well and enjoying it. But I felt it much more strongly before I finished writing this novel. The novel has been an odyssey unlike what I could have anticipated. It was not just telling a story. It was a self-exploration; an autopsy of ambiguities.



Beth Gwinn



BRUTES

by Steve Rasnic Tem

Each night, the faces in Simon's windows grew broader, grew bolder. He had finally given up wondering who they were: burglars, homeless, gang bangers out to shoot him, or just the curious. He saw a lot of the curious these days: cool, impassive faces, but eyes watching him all the time, their curiosity such a hunger it had become a habit, those wide white

eyes a monkey's.

But he didn't know what any of them thought, what any of them wanted. He didn't know what anybody wanted. And it didn't seem to matter much anymore.

When Simon was eight, his father bought him a dog,



Illustrations by Timothy Standish

paid some fellow who was going to shoot the dog five dollars to turn the mutt over to him. That dog wasn't the pet Simon had wanted, not by a long shot. Simon had wanted something small, clean, sweet-smelling, something to cuddle. The dog -- which Simon's father had already named Brute -- was fat, old, and ugly, with a mercurial temperament which ranged from a melancholy lethargy to an agitated, slobbering madness.

When his dad first gave him the dog he had told Simon that he was going to learn a lot from the animal. "Because he's just like people," he told him. "Some of them are born hard and mean, and some of them just get that way. You can't trust them too far. You never know what goes on inside their heads. After awhile they get to be unpredictable. They're liable to do almost anything. Just as likely to bite you as to lick you."

Simon hadn't wanted to go near the dog. Instead he'd spent hours watching him out his bedroom window.

"He's *your* dog," his father had told him. "You have to spend some time with him. You need to get to know him--get to know when he'll let you pet him, and when he's gonna bite--that's the only way you'll be safe with him, you know."

The first few weeks Simon had simply tried to avoid the old dog's mouth. Occasionally he'd build up the courage to pet the dog, although he didn't really know how you could pet a dog like that. Patting seemed too close to hitting; if he

patted too hard maybe the dog would get mad and take his hand off. He didn't know how he could stroke the dog. Brute's hide was all stiff, tough folds that didn't yield much when he touched them.

He soon discovered that Brute could be deceptively quick. He'd been standing by Brute--who'd appeared to be dozing--with a slice of pizza hanging from his far hand. Suddenly Brute had twisted and lunged, and the pizza was gone, the tip of Simon's finger dripping blood.

"Watch him close," his father told him as he bandaged the finger. "Watch him close enough and you'll be able to tell pretty much what he's about to do."

So Simon watched Brute. It was difficult to tell when the dog was going to be angry--sometimes there'd be a slight twitch in the jowls, or a sudden furious blink in one eye, but usually much less than that. Brute would move suddenly from sleep or a quiet sitting to furious barking and a snapping of teeth.

As Brute grew older, the mood swings became even more unpredictable. After awhile, feeding Brute his daily grub became a risky endeavor.

"Can't I just throw him something?" Simon stood at the screen door off the back porch, a bucket of scraps by his feet. His father was working on the kitchen sink, his back to Simon. Simon wondered briefly if he could hide the scraps, but if he got caught there was no telling what his dad might do to

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him.

"Throw 'im something? Is that any way to train an animal? You know what you're *supposed* to do; it's *your* responsibility."

"He's too old to train anyway. Too mean," Simon mumbled.

"What's that?"

"Nothing, Dad. I'll take the scraps out."

Simon pushed his face up against the screen. He could see Brute's enormous head jutting out of the doghouse, but he didn't think the dog could see him through the mesh. The battered summer screens for the windows were leaning against the outside of the house; Simon thought about using one of those for a shield. He wondered how close he could get before Brute figured out what was going on. The dog's intelligence seemed to vary from day to day. But if his dad saw him he'd get mad—because he was messing with the screens without permission and because it was dumb. Simon knew it was dumb; he had sense. But sometimes Brute made him do some pretty dumb things.

Simon eased out of the door, being careful not to bump the can of scraps with his leg. He had accidentally jangled the can once before and Brute had gone straight for Simon's leg.

Brute's head did not move. Maybe he was sleeping. Thick folds of skin hung down over his dark eye holes, so you could never tell if his eyes were open or closed, and the open sores he always seemed to have on his head made him look forever angry. Actually, Simon didn't know if Brute was ever angry. He didn't know what Brute was thinking at all. Maybe he was just mean. And maybe "mean" didn't mean anything to Brute. Maybe Brute just was.

"You going or not?" his father called out from the porch. Each time he had to feed Brute he hated his father just a little. He supposed after his mom left his dad didn't have to stay—he could have turned Simon over to one of his aunts. But his dad kept him, and tried different ways of raising him. Experiments like Brute. He just wished his dad wasn't so angry all the time. "I asked if you were going!" Simon felt himself shaking. *He'll wake the devil...*

"Yeah, Dad..." He stared at Brute lying half out of his doghouse, but Simon's vision seemed to lose focus. He couldn't tell if Brute had stirred or not. Simon took a few steps forward, holding the bucket away from his body—his wrist strained painfully—so he'd be sure not to bump the bucket. He glanced cautiously at the dim sky, hoping the sun would stay behind the clouds. The bucket had a dull finish but now and then could reflect a sharp fragment of light. He also thought it possible that the dog couldn't see as well in this kind of light, although certainly he couldn't be sure. The breeze picked up slightly, stiffening the hair on his bare ankles. The breeze appeared to ripple the dog's stubby fur, or was that anger?

Simon was only a few feet away from Brute when the old dog raised his head. Simon held his breath, gripping the bucket tightly, hoping it wouldn't swing. As if Brute might think he was a statue or something. It was crazy.

Brute lowered his head. The folds over his eyes grew

thicker. Simon could feel the old dog's heavy breathing sigh even from several feet away. Simon took a few slow, careful steps.

Brute's jaws snapped open. Simon stopped, holding himself up. He watched as Brute growled and snapped in his sleep, angry or mean or indifferent.

Simon looked down into Brute's bucket of scraps. The meat was rotten. Maggots crawled in and out of volcanic sores covering the surfaces of several pieces. "They'll eat *anything*," his dad always said. "Even their own shit. Once a dog gets it into his head that what he's lockin' at is *food*, he eats it, no questions asked. Just like people. You tell them something, any damn thing, and nine times out of ten they believe it."

It was true. His dad said Brute was going to be his best friend in the world, and no matter how frightened Simon was of the dog, he still believed it.

Finally Simon got to within a step of Brute's huge, sore-ridden head. He stood slightly to the side to avoid casting a shadow on the dog.

He reached into the bucket and pulled out a piece of meat. Something wet crawled up onto the back of his hand. He gasped and let the scrap go.

It flew end-over-end and landed on the front of Brute's face, by the network of wrinkles hiding the left eye. The wrinkles exploded and a red-lined, jellied eyeball fixed on Simon. But the rest of the dog's features showed no movement.

He waited for Brute to leap and take him with those huge jaws. The eyeball remained rigid, as if carved, painted, and glazed. He grew faint from the effort of holding himself still.

The screen door slammed behind him. "Ain't you fed that dog yet?" His father's voice: raw and edgy.

Brute rolled past him, a sudden squall. Simon looked up just as the huge dog covered his dad. For just a moment there was a faint red mist where the two made contact, and the rest happened as if in slow motion: the lunge, the gangle, the bright red jets as his father's face dissolved into Brute's head, jaws, and rust-colored fur, growing brighter each second as his father fell to the ground.

It didn't take long, and after it was over Brute went over to the shade tree and lay down in the shadows. Simon stayed on the ground for about an hour, waiting for his father to get up. When his father didn't get up Simon went past the body and into the kitchen, where he made himself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. After he finished his sandwich, Simon went back to the screen door and pressed his face there, watching his father's body, and the red that grew darker as the shadow under the tree spread to cover the yard. Eventually Brute got up and went back to his dog house and finished off the scraps.

Simon watched some TV, then he watched his father some more, then he watched Brute as the dog slept. When it got to be his own bedtime he decided he didn't want to sleep in a dark house by himself.

"Aunt Betty? This is Simon. I think something's wrong with Dad."

Brute was simple. He wanted to eat. When the time was right, he wanted to fuck. And he wanted everything his bloody eyes could see.

"They ain't gonna let you be, Simon. You gotta choose. Every kid comin' up in this neighborhood gotta choose. No other way." Shakey was scared, but then as far as Simon knew, Shakey had always been scared. He scraped three claw-like fingers through his shiny red hair.

"I'm no gang banger. You know me. I watch, I don't do. Learned that a long time ago."

"They don't let you sit it out--you oughta know that. You're there to recruit or to overcome. No other way."

Simon knew, but the idea of talking over the finer points of gang politics with Shakey was nothing short of ridiculous. He watched as Shakey gnawed the end of his cigarette into oblivion. The rest of the cigarette tumbled to the rug.

"Damn..." Shakey went to his coat for the pack, ignoring the butt smoking on Aunt Betty's rug. Simon scooted his foot over and crushed it out. Aunt Betty wouldn't know. Even if she made it out of the hospital this time--which seemed unlikely--her eyes were too bad to see the smudge. Aunt Betty was a good lady. Things shouldn't have to go down that way for someone like her. Simon felt guilty, knowing there wasn't much to do for her. He owed her everything.

Brute wandered out of the back bedroom.

"Jeezus! Ain't that dog dead yet?" Shakey went to stand behind Simon's chair.

Simon took a pull on his bottle. "Too mean to die," he said, watching as the old dog wandered to the center of the rug before plopping down. Brute lay with his eyes open, red rims fixed on Simon. *Still waiting for me to slip up, aren't you, Brute?*

"I don't like dogs," Shakey said. "Never have. And I especially don't like that dog."

"Nobody does."

Brute shifted his head slightly to the side, as if trying to see what Shakey was up to. Simon could feel Shakey growing smaller behind him. Simon had lied to everybody about Brute and his father, from the day it happened. He'd never known why. He'd told Aunt Betty that some other dog did it, that a Great Dane had entered their yard in a rage--he must have been crazy or rabid or something--and that was the dog that killed his dad. Brute had tried to stop the other dog, but Dad had him chained up that day. To protect that lie he'd had to get close enough to Brute to wash him down with the hose, get all his father's blood out of Brute's fur, then attach the chain they'd never used to his collar. And Brute just stood there and let Simon do it, as if he actually understood why it had to be done.

Aunt Betty had bought the whole story, and she was the one who told the cops what had happened. They appeared more skeptical. But there wasn't much of an investigation; Simon supposed no one could imagine why he might lie about it. They'd posted warning signs and hunted that Great Dane for months. Four or five Great Danes were shot and killed, and

everybody had argued about whether they'd gotten the right one or not.

Brute yawned hugely. His mouth was diseased-looking. But the teeth still looked sharp.

"The city isn't theirs," Simon said.

"They don't need the whole damn city," Shakey said from behind the chair. "They only need as far as they can see. As far as they can walk when it's hot out. Why take more than you can eat? And that's the neighborhood. Your neighborhood. Without that, they're nothing."

"Then they're nothing," Simon said.

"So? What are we?" Shakey strangled a laugh.

"Maybe we're nothing, too."

The window a few feet from Shakey's head exploded. Simon turned his face as if in slow motion, just as Shakey's head began peeling itself apart, as if in reaction to the loudness of the sound. Shakey's body jerked a few times as more bullets struck. Then Simon was on the floor, his body wedged up against Brute's, with no memory of how he got there. The gunfire continued for several minutes before it was replaced by car door slams and the screech of departing tires. The remaining silence slowly filled with dust and smoke.

Brute yawned hugely. His mouth was diseased-looking.

Brute groaned once, then pissed all over the rug. The old dog staggered to his feet, then went over to lick at the remains of Shakey's head. He pawed at the mess, as if checking to see if there was something there he wanted.

When Simon went to visit his Aunt Betty the next day two guys, both so thin it was scary, stopped him outside the hospital. They both had green scarves for belts, greenish canine teeth dangling from pierced ears. They seemed to be of no particular race--their color was grayish, their features small, ordinary.

"Some trouble..." the tallest one mumbled out of a vague shadowline of mouth.

"What's that?" Simon was distracted by the shorter one. At first it seemed the boy had no eyes, then he realized the eyes were closed, but Simon couldn't detect the edges of the lids.

"Your place. You had some trouble last night," the taller one said.

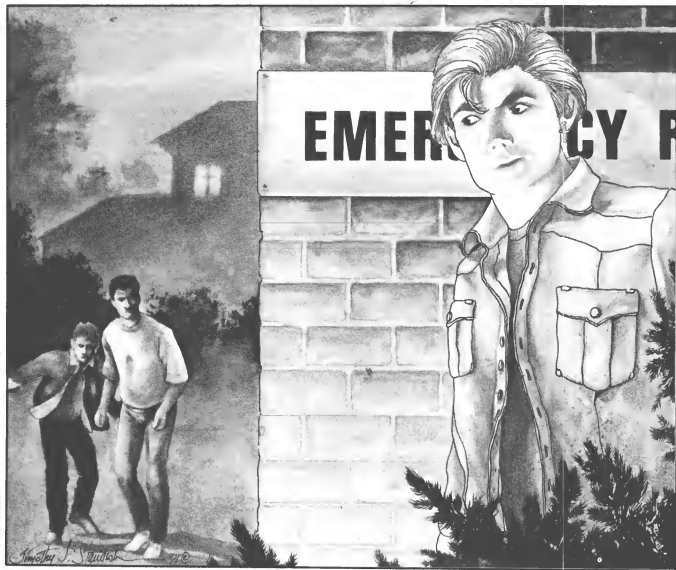
Simon tried to stare noncommittally at the taller gang banger, but he couldn't find one feature to fix on. "You know about it?"

"All about it. All that needs be known."

"Then tell your friends..." Simon said shakily. "They don't want me. Not really. Right now they think they do, but they don't."

"So you don't care 'bout your friend dyin'? You don't care about maybe you dyin'?"

BRUTES



Simon paused a moment. The two gang bangers seemed to be fading under the bright sun. He wondered if the conversation went on too long whether they'd disappear completely. Even now they had faces like blank canvas sacks. "No," he said. "I don't think so. Do you care?"

The tall boy began to walk backwards into the shadows of buildings. Fading. "Nope," he said. Then, "g'night," and blew Simon a kiss. And it made Simon furious, because it reminded him of his mother. In fact it was the only thing he could remember about his mother.

"night," the shorter one said, as the shadows swallowed his face. "member now."

Simon walked home from the hospital. If something important was going to go down that night he wanted to at least be able to say that he'd walked among the "normal" people in the city, the people whose lives had nothing to do with either gangs, dead mothers and fathers, or brute, mindless canines.

All the old ones either ignored him or went out of their way to avoid him. They knew well enough. Unlike most kids his age, he supposed, Simon knew that age did bring some

understanding as to essentials. Danger and pain. Death and one more stiff-jointed morning. But the eyes of the old were still cold. And in those sagging mouths their teeth were terribly sharp.

As he passed one old man--white hair yellowed to butter at the roots, filmy gray eyes and lips the same color--he could sense the bony fingers tightening on the cane, ready to dash out Simon's brains if he even looked the wrong way.

An old lady with silver and white hair reached into her purse, keeping her hand inside, forearm so tense he thought the ancient bone might snap, watching him as he passed.

A big bruiser of a guy in a greasy blue jumpsuit clenched his fists as Simon passed him crossing the street.

Two young girls--a redhead, a blonde--crossed to the other side of the street. A middle aged mother and her two kids parked at the curb in the hot sun waited until he was on the next block before getting out of the car.

They all had invisible muscle hanging down over their eyes, the hard tissue sending roots and feelers down into their brains. They had an itchiness in their teeth. They were unpredictable, capable of anything.

Simon could feel his own teeth pushing against the tender backsides of his lips, his forehead thickening, making all but the most essential thought virtually impossible.

As the sun fell slowly through narrow clouds of pollution, turning the sky a bruise color, Simon saw the faces in each window, watching him. He took the long way around the neighborhood, following the back alleys to Aunt Betty's house. But there were faces in the shadowed back yards, faces in the abandoned wrecks, peeking out of the stinking garbage cans. And the few times he was able to see the faces close up, and attach them to a body, he could find no expression in them, no interest, just a brute, indefinable need.

When Simon got home he discovered Brute lying in the front hallway. The dog was still breathing, but in a ragged, painful way. He raised his muzzle slightly, trying to take a nip out of Simon's face, but he barely had enough strength to open up his jaws. He stared at Simon with his bloody eyes, his nostrils flaring, pushing his teeth at Simon's face, but unable to reach him.

Simon threw his arms around the dog. It was what he'd always wanted to do. He had to wedge his shoulder against the dog's throat to protect himself from the teeth, because the harder he hugged the more Brute tried to bite and chew him. Simon buried his face against the old dog's ear, and kissed him, and Brute snarled softly, scraping his eager teeth against his long pale tongue, snarling and choking on the snarls, until his body grew limp in Simon's arms.

As the darkness closed in outside, and the streetlights came on, Simon left all the lights in the house off. He hadn't bothered to board up the window they'd shot out the night before. There didn't seem to be much point. The living room still smelled where the police had cleaned up Shakey's body. The other smell was from Brute emptying his bowels as he died. For some reason the stench didn't bother Simon; they were almost interesting--the mix of them in his nose made him feel more alive. And their presence in the house did not seem out of place. Brute's body was on the back porch, wedged against the back door.

It was a hot night, and the heat built up steadily inside Simon's head. After a few hours his eyes closed slightly from the mounting pressure. It required almost a physical effort to hold on to his thoughts. He was hungry, but couldn't think of anything he could bear to eat. Now and then there would be strange noises outside the house--shiftings, coughings--and the periodic fear they brought gave him useless erections. The house was his, his family's. They had no right.

Where are the neighbors? It was a funny thing to think about. There were always neighbors, weren't there? Everybody had neighbors. But it seemed he hadn't seen any of them in months. He wondered if they'd all moved away. Maybe they were all dead, rotting in their houses. But that didn't make sense.

Simon walked along the wall to an east-facing window. He peered around the edge at his neighbor's house. Three of the neighbor's windows were lit, and in each window was a dark, motionless silhouette. Simon waited. Now and then the silhouette in the upper window glowed softly from a bright-red point held close to the face. A cigarette. Simon shifted his head

slightly. He could see pieces of other neighbors' houses, the windows lit, grayish blotches in the windows, watching.

This is your neighborhood. All you can do is watch? But the thoughts were heavy, useless. Losing focus. He could barely read his own thoughts. He slid away from the window. He held back a snarl that came up suddenly from down deep in his throat, almost choking him. He bumped into the wall, and he felt like attacking it with his teeth, chewing it down and swallowing the pieces. He had the right. It was his. All he could see was, or should be, his. The smell of Brute's body was heavy in the air, sticking over Simon's skin and hair like oil.

He caught a face looking at him. In his own house. He turned on a table lamp and stared at himself in the mirror. He couldn't read the expression in his own eyes. His eyes were dull, dark as skillers. His skin was gray, nondescript, without character. He couldn't trust the face. *You afraid to die?* he asked the face, but the face acted as if it did not understand. The thoughts moved like heavy oil. He struggled with the lamp switch, finally jerking out the cord and smashing the lamp against the table.

Lights floated outside. He wandered back to the window.

Each house had a light, and a silhouette. All his. The dried mud of the yard had cracked; weeds grew through the broken brick of the walk. The street was missing huge pieces. The large metal corpses of the abandoned cars leaned crazily on what remained of the curbs. The darkness hid small pockets of stench wherever he turned his head. All his, everything he could see.

The shadows walked out of the holes in the street, from behind the abandoned cars and his neighbors' houses. As they got closer to the house, he could see the green scarves in their belt loops, the glint of canines dangling from their ears. He scraped his teeth across his lips, and he could feel the brittle tissue tear. The shadows passed close by his window, and showed him their faces: gray and featureless, no character in the eyes. *They don't give a damn. They're nothing.* His thoughts like sludge.

They didn't have to break down the door. He let them in. He was desperately hungry for something, but what it was he did not know.

He wanted to eat. They wanted to eat. When the time was right, he wanted to fuck. They wanted to fuck, and they didn't care if what they fucked was alive or dead. And turning their bland, featureless faces to the dying neighborhood, they wanted everything their eyes could see.

Steve Rasnic Tem's fiction has appeared in *Pulphouse*, *The Horror Show*, *Whispers*, *Fantasy Tales*, and several anthologies including *Book of the Dead*, *Psycho Paths*, and *New Terrors*. Recent works include *Fairytale*, a chapbook published by Roadkill Press, and *Abscences: Charlie Goode's Ghost*, five original traditional ghost stories. His novel *Excavation* was recently published by Avon.

LANDSDALE RAVES!



Beth Gwinn

by Joe R. Lansdale

Part 2

Last column I told the true story about the Phone Woman. Not long after, I turned that true story, or at least a portion of it, into a short story. It appeared under the title "The Phone Woman" in NIGHT VISIONS 8 from DARK HARVEST. If you'd like to compare the article to the short story to see how this developed, please do. This way, you buy a book, and I get a royalty.

Well, Joe, how do you do this marvelous stuff? This turning of article into short story?

Glad you asked that. Gives me the lead in I need.

Way you do this, is you take something true, and then

very, very carefully, you add in some lies. Now that we've got that out of the way, let's continue.

The fact that I turned a true event into a story, proves, at least in my mind, my thesis, as expounded in Part One, that what's around you is not only strange, it's story material. The slightest twisting of reality can become a story. Simple as that. And the story, due to the fact that the events you're writing about are at least rooted in truth, packs a more powerful punch than the usual drek about fairies and elves and little dragons and unipoos taking fair maidens and noble knights for a romp through the purple flowers. Unless, of course, that has happened to you.

Am I saying that to write a good story you must write about something that has happened to you?

Nope, ain't necessarily saying that. But I am saying two things.

One: writing about what you know, meaning events that have happened to you, to those you know, writing about your background, gives your story a solid canvass. Or writing about something you really have expertise at, gives your story an edge that a purely imagination oriented writer lacks.

My God, Lansdale is that a criticism of imagination?

Well, no, not at all. Truth to tell, you haven't got an imagination, then, in this business, you are, to put it in French, fucked. But to use one of them architectural metaphors, reality is like the foundation you put under a story house when it's built. Imagination is the rest of your story house, and that's the glorious part. That's where you live and eat and sleep and do the big doodoo. But, as any "literary" architect will tell you, if you don't have a solid foundation for your house of imagination, then it'll fall down around your ears in a crushing heap of squeaking nails and groaning lumber, and possibly drop you and your story into the midst of that big doodoo you were taking when the shabby foundation you built went out from

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under you.

"Two: So people don't think I'm picking purely on dragon and elf and unipoo stories, cause I ain't, I'll add this: It's possible to write convincingly about dragons and elves and unipoos without having met some of them thar critters, and make even me like it.

Way you do this, is you read a book someone else has written and you rewrite it and make yours highly original by changing the color of the elf caps from red to green, and by giving your unicorn a twelve inch horn as opposed to the peanut horn on the unicorn in the story your stealing. If the caps in the book you're copying are not red, or if the unicorn horn is bigger than a peanut, then I don't know what you can do.

All right, I'm kidding. Way you make these kind of stories, or related type stories real, is the way you make any story real. Know your subject. Read about and study the habits of these mythical creatures. People have actually bothered to research this sort of material, so it's in the library for you to find and study. If you have all this research in your back-ground, then you can tie your unipoos and dragons and elves and talking fruit jars, whatever, to reality. And if you do, your story has a greater chance of working, being "believed" by the reader.

If you don't think fiction of this nature can be done well, that the hardboiled reader can't like and appreciate it, then check out Charles De Lint. This guy can put a spin on anything, and on top of that, he can actually write, and write well. Hopefully, he will be an influence on the up and coming generation of fantasy writers, those that choose to work in either the contemporary or the classical tradition. De Lint's a class act all the way around. And it's because there is a sense of conviction and reality about his stories. He also has, besides a brilliant imagination, the other element these stories need to be believed: characters.

But back to true life and the stories they produce.

A demonstration.

Once upon time, Joe Boy, that's me, was sitting in his house with his feet propped up, trying to read a short story or a book, or something, I don't quite remember, and my son, who I guess was about four or five at the time, came in from the yard and said, "Daddy, there's a man wants to see you outside."

Keep the part about "wants to see you" in mind. There's a certain irony in that.

Me and Keith went outside, and sure enough, there was a man out there. Remember, this is East Texas, dead of summer, and not only was it over a hundred degrees, but this part of Texas is thick with trees, and is therefore also seriously thick with humidity. You wear that damn humidity like a coat wherever you go, it settles over your head like a fur-lined cloth bag. Day like this, lizards wear hats and sunglasses and look for shade.

But back to the guy. He was lean and a little frail looking and he wore dark glasses and his hair was down in his face and greasy enough to wring out and fill up a Vaseline jar. There were pops of sweat on his skin the look and size of small, yellow blisters. You take Hitler out of the catbird seat in hell,

stand him by this guy, and comparatively, Hitler would look cool as a Eskimo. Maybe you're beginning to get the idea that this was one hot day.

Fact is, the ole boy looked on the verge of faint, and across his forehead was a white welt about the length and width of a Number Two pencil, unsharpened.

The thing that struck me as peculiar, however, was the fact that in his right hand he was holding a weed eater, and in his left hand, a white-tipped, blind man's cane.

I said, "My son said you wanted to speak to me."

"Yes sir," he said, "I'm the grounds keeper for the church next door, and I was wondering if you could show me the spots I've missed."

A blind grounds keeper?

Yes, even I was surprised, though I shouldn't have been.

I put some things together then; the welt on his head was due to the fact that he'd heard my son playing in our yard and had followed his voice, and in the process, introduced himself to a low hanging tree limb. That gave him the Number Two pencil on the forehead, and he was hot for the reason he had stated. He had been working as the grounds keeper next door. Well, I took the ole boy by the elbow and guided him back over to the church lot, and it was one sad sight that met my baby greens. Not only was that wood and tin death trap the religious folks called a church still standing and still ugly, the surrounding acreage grass, which due to the mid summer sun had turned the color of a nicotine stain, looked like a head of hair that had been cut by a drunk barber. There were bald spots here and there, but far too many sprigs of grass had been spared.

The flowers that had been planted along side the church, however, had not been spared, and in fact, they had been trimmed perfectly. Right down to the goddamn dirt.

It was sad, brethren. Those church idiots had hired a blind grounds keeper and given him a weed eater to attend to a couple acres of grass, then they'd just turned him loose, and gone into town to eat lunch.

Worse yet, the ole boy was grateful and wanted desperately to do a good job. He was probably getting a couple of whole Yankee dollars for his work. And like the folks who had hired him, he was of their religious belief, and thought he had been blessed to get the work. The mercy of Jesus, it is astounding, ain't it?

I got to admit to you, putting this as simply as I can, folks who'd hire a blind man to do this kind of job ought to have been horse whipped and had their assholes salted. Even if I thought I wanted to save a few bucks on yard help, or even if my reasons were charitable, the giving of work to the blind and all that, I wouldn't give such a fella a weed eater and turn him loose in the hot sun on a couple acres of grass without supervision. This is sort of like firing up a chainsaw and giving it to a paraplegic to do a little tree trim work. It may, at the bottom of it all, stem from altruistic impulses, but such an act unquestionably displays all the brain cells of a small patch of dirt where no ants live.

Besides, I don't think for a minute they hired this fellow for charitable reasons. They were saving a few dollars,

and it was damn hot out there and they didn't want to do it themselves.

Well, I took the poor man by the elbow, and since I wanted to see him make his dollars, and he was damn adamant about doing a good job. We wandered over that two acres for a couple of hours and I guided him and his weed eater about, and he buzzed and buzzed for a while, then finally had had enough. Which pleased me. I'd certainly had enough.

But I got to tell you, what work he did do with my guidance, considering that grass was as tough as chicken wire, was pretty good. You can bet there were some grasshoppers and crickets running for serious cover before he hung up that little tool.

When he finally admitted he was tuckered, he was as red as the tip of a dog's pecker, and I wasn't Mr. Fresh neither. I felt like I had been shot at and missed, shit on and hit.

Tell you the truth, I still feel a little guilty when I think back on that fella. I took him over to the sign post that told the name of the church and left him and his cane and his weed eater leaning against it, out there in the broiling hot sun, while I retreated to the house and the air conditioner and a glass of ice tea.

About an hour later I thought of the groundskeeper and went out to check on him, and he was still leaning there on the sign Post -- hanging is more the proper word -- like old moss growing to the side of a tree.

I don't know where my manners were. I should have brought that fella some ice tea or invited him into the house for awhile, but I guess I was a little stunned by all this. And had I invited him into the house, I lived in a certain terror that the discussion might turn to that of yard trimming and the proper weed eaters for the task, and maybe how Jesus had done great things for his life. I couldn't have that. Talk like that might have driven me a little savage. I might have lain in wait for the church folks. Jumped out at them when they parked their car, attacked them with a loaded weed-eater.

You know, next day you'd see headlines like:

LANSDALE GOES SAVAGE. WEED EATS ENTIRE FAMILY OF RELIGIOUS NUTS.

Suffice to say, the grounds keeping job didn't prove steady. I never saw the blind man, or the weed eater, again. I guess the weed eater was the blind man's personal tool and he took it home with him.

Okay, Mr. Lansdale, that's real interesting. But what the hell has this got to do with writing stories?

I'm coming to that. Indulge me, would you?

The little anecdote I've just related is pretty damn odd. I think, though in my life, pretty par for the course, it



Beth Gwinn

seems. As a writer, I could have taken this incident and carried it a step further, made some kind of story out of it, but I didn't.

Say you didn't, Mr. Lansdale? Well, you dumb horse's ass, why tell us the story at all?

Fair question. Here's the answer.

Unlike the "Phone Woman", where I took a real incident and developed a story from it, *The Blind Man And The Weed Eater* opened a different gate. I began to consider what type of people would hire a blind grounds keeper. The answer, obviously, was my next door neighbors, so I started thinking about them, the head nut in particular, the preacher, and gradually a profile developed.

Now, our next door neighbors were a little different.

They were church people of a dubious nomination, though in my book, they're all pretty damn dubious, but this was an even odder bunch of ducks than usual. They were some off-shoot of a branch of Pentecostals who were an off-shoot branch of some other off-shoot branch. The next step after these folks would have been the bunch who dance with snakes in their teeth, which these folks didn't do, much to my disappointment. I always wanted to see some snake handler types, long as I could watch them through about six-feet of smoked glass. You can run bubba Joe a mile with a fucking snake, that's what I'm trying to tell you, but still, I'd like to see these folks go at it. The idea of rattlesnakes and copperheads as part of the gospel

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tickles the shit out of me. I bet those religious dudes don't fuck with wear moccasins much, though. Those little buddies are mean as...a snake. They get up about five in the morning, push their hats back on their heads and go look for trouble. If these guys could drive a pickup, it'd be one of those with a filled gun rack and there'd be a pit bull riding in the back with a baby in its jaws. What I'm trying to tell you, brethren, these snakes had legs and thumbs, we'd be living in holes on the creek banks and they'd be watching bad television programs and reading the TV GUIDE.

Not that I'd seriously consider handling any poisonous snake, and the non-poisonous ones make me nervous, too. I just don't like all that goddamn wiggling.

When we first moved into this house we encountered a lot of snakes, poison and non-poison. My motto is simple. You're non-poisonous, it's okay you're in my yard, long as you don't surprise me. Surprise me, Mr. Snake, or Mrs., or Ms. Snake, and you're liable to end up on the business end of the famous Lansdale snake dance. This has to do with my graceless number nines flying left and right all over you due to having frightened the shit out of me.

Poisonous snakes, no sir. You can't stay in the yard. You can live in the woods, you want, and I come out there I'm fair game, but I won't tolerate venomous reptiles in my yard, around my family or me. Its time then and there for you, Mr., Mrs. or Ms Snake, to go to the big snake roundup in the sky.

But I've wandered again. An East Texan hears mention of snakes, well, he or she's got at least fifteen stories to tell, half of personal experience, the rest a combo of passed down tales and down right lies. Which, by the way, is something for which East Texans are known. Not the snakes, though we're certainly known for that, but the lies. East Texans are considered the liars and story tellers of Texas.

Back to them church folks. Okay, this guy next door couldn't make it as musician, though I did hear he'd actually played on the Grand Ole Opry, and like that music or not, those folks ain't no slouches in the instrument division, but he was a washout there. Story was, he sucked the bottle too hard.

And the bottle led to new career. He became a liquor salesman. That didn't work out either. It was sort of like hiring a wolf to watch over a pound of hamburger meat. Our erstwhile hero drank up the merchandise. The job failed. Opportunity looked dim. Back problems began to plague our boy. He lost a few pounds off of his immense belly. Grey appeared in his beard, which had all the charm of a large economy size chunk of steel wool--used.

But even a blind pig can find an acorn now and then, and God moves in mysterious and shitty ways, and all that, so our boy come upon his acorn, and his acorn was a woman. We'll call her Mary, since that was the name of Jesus's mother, and I like to keep a religious theme going once I've set forth in that direction.

Well, Mary had a bad break of a sort. Her husband had been kicked to death by a psycho out of the asylum. This psycho guy wasn't supposed to be out, but he got out anyway. They screwed up and let him out. Maybe he showed them his library card or something. That would probably do it. You got to keep in mind that institutions like this work at a high level.

They don't trifle with the sick folks in the institution, they stick to more important matters. Like lunch breaks and holidays and cashing their checks come payday.

So this fella, a genuine nut in need of proper attention, was out roaming the streets, and he come up on this guy who was the husband of the aforementioned Mary, and I reckon we'll call him Joseph. Without so much as a "Howdy, fuck you very much," the boy from the asylum proceeded to practice a few soccer moves on the unfortunate Joseph.

I am not making this up. He kicked that poor man so hard and so often, that he tore the clothes off of him in the process. He then proceeded to stomp him so long and so hard, you couldn't tell if Joseph was a human being or a rather large package of run over jelly rolls.

Needless to say, the jelly rolls did not recover, and after the belligerent fella was returned to the place from which he had escaped and his library card was revoked, Mary came into a nice cash settlement, and our boy of the brillo pad beard and the physique by HUNGRY MAN DINNER, spotted poor Mary, and was immediately overcome with greed.

He married Mary. The heavens rejoiced.

God spoke to our fat, bearded man, who we will refer to from here on out as Joseph No. 2 and the Lord got drunk one night and came to him and said, "Saaay. Ya wanta build a goddamn church?" And our old boy did want to build a goddamn church, and he did. And low and behold, due to God and Joseph Number One's insurance settlement, across from the Lansdales there rose up a huge, ugly tin building about the size of an aircraft hanger, situated on about two or three acres of Johnson grass and weeds.

The house on the lot was already there, and had once been very nice, but a long line of religious fanatics had sold the house within their own kind, and during those exchanges, the house, which had been acceptable, began to drip strips of Sherman Williams Number 10 white paint, applied by the first owners sometime shortly after Paul Revere's famous ride. The Yard was nice, too. The sixteen million dogs that were owned by the various God blessed families had left their trademarks all over the front yard. That being holes in which the back bumpers of unfortunate cars were still visible; deeper holes that coughed steam from the center of the earth. The house's chimney eventually came to be held up with a long stretch of two-by-four. The two-by-four was very nice. Made of solid lumber and rotten in only a couple of spots. Yankees from out of town used to drive by for a look so they could go home and tell how they'd actually seen an authentic white trash house and family while on vacation.

But to be fair, this last group of religious nuts -- the bearded elephant in the overalls and his clan fixed the place up. They were part of the religious nuts who had proceeded them, but they were, it must be noted, neat. Neater than we are. About three times a year the grass in our yard got so high Hollywood agents used to show up at our door asking if it would be all right to film a Tarzan movie out there.

But, let us return to the religious nuts, neat or not.

So the place got cleaned up and the big tin building took in a few visitors come Sunday and preaching went on and singing went on, and in time, orange day glow gutters about

the size of john boats (I swear, I am not making this up) went up along our street, placed at strategic spots till they reached the main highway. The guitar necks were made with arrow heads on their ends so they could point the way to that which was advertised in Phosphorescent white paint across the front of the day-glow orange guitars: THE GOSPEL OPRY. Come night, those orange babies seemed to float in the air, guiding you to where God and Jesus and the Holy Ghost, their own selves, were gathering for a little picking and grinning and off-key gospel singing. Come seven o'clock in the evening, place begin to look like a used car lot, and when they ran out of parking over there, well, by God, that wasn't any problem. God provided our yard. My first inclination in a situation like this was to shit on windshields, but, contrary to what some might think, I just didn't have enough shit in me to go around. So, I didn't.

Suffice to say, the opry didn't go for long. Couple evenings in the ole hot aircraft hanger cured that, and I figure folks who'd showed up began to look for God and Jesus in more air-conditioned places. But the bottom line is this: I looked at all that was going on over there, and I begin to add in fictional elements.

You see, this ole boy wandering around the yard wearing overalls stretched out over a humongous belly, set me in mind of a cartoon elephant. And when I read an article about Tom Parker. Elvis's infamous manager, having a fetish about elephants, believing they were his totem animal (and I don't claim there's truth to the story, just saying it inspired me), the background for my Preacher. Joseph No. 2, began to develop.

I also added in all the rumors I'd heard about the religious clan, not caring if they were true or not, because what I was writing here was fiction, not truth.

Sort of.

And what came out was a story called "The Fat Man And The Elephant", available in my short story collection "By Bizarre Hands". I'm not going to outline the story here, I want you to buy the book, either hardback or paper, it doesn't matter, but I will say that the blind man and the weed eater doesn't appear in the story at all. But still, it was this event that got me to thinking, extrapolating, and my approach here was to dismiss the original inspirational event altogether and go for a story based on the sort of folks who'd hire a blind ground's keeper in the first place.

So now you see how my mind works, and maybe, just maybe, it'll give you some better understanding of where I get my ideas and help you think in a manner that will develop story ideas. I'm not saving you should do it my way, but I am trying to honestly answer, "Where Do You Get Your Ideas?", and perhaps set your own brain cells to chugging, looking at what



Beth Gwinn

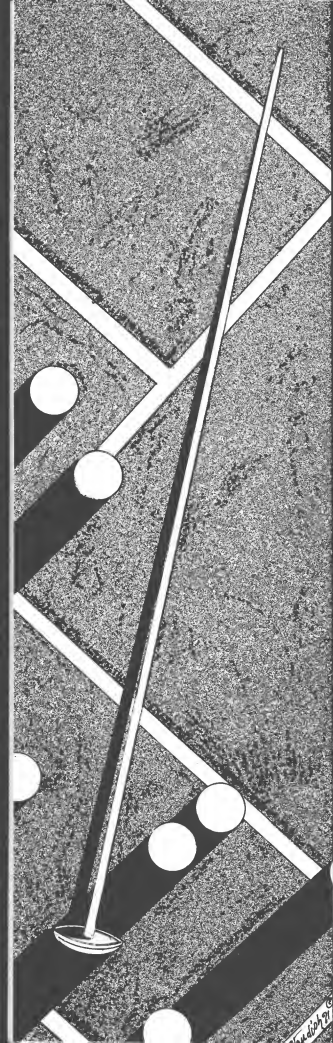
you see, evaluating what you know, and putting some lies and tail spins to it so you can produce stories that have the ring of truth about them, bizarre as they might be, and that best of all, will have your voice in them, the thing that may be the most original tool in any writer's tool box.

Guess you could say I'm not a high concept kind of guy. You know, you see, you got these two guys, and one's a cop, and get this, the other's a cop, but...but, you listening now...He's a werewolf! No...No wait. A ghost?

That's carrying it to the extreme. High concept, is as valid a way of working as any, but it's a different deal from the way I think altogether. I can't help you there. I've come up with a couple of ideas like that, but I deal best in a different sort of story. The sort I have outlined in these two columns. So, if you want to know how to do high concept, I'm not the fella to explain it.

Well, I see I'm running out of space here, and I didn't get to tell you about my trip to the circus like I'd hoped, but hell, we've got one more column. So, put on your clown suit, and I'll see you next time. And maybe, just maybe, I'll pull all this shit together so that it'll have great meaning in your life. And maybe I won't pull it all together.

But I'm trying. Really



Handwritten text, possibly a signature or date, located in the bottom right corner of the left panel.

ZITS

by Nina Kiriki Hoffman

Once I read a book where they put the jewels in the teddy bear's stomach. A lot of people were chasing that teddy bear but the kids and the police got it in the end and when they sliced him open, there were all those colored jewels, sparkling and shining and promising everything.

You have to dig deepest to find the best secrets, my daddy said, burying his in me.

Some secrets you don't want to keep.

The worst zits are the red ones where you can't see any white. You press them and the white doesn't pop out. You have to dig around with a needle to find the white under the blood, because until you get the pearly white out the sore won't heal no matter how many times you pull the scab off. And you've only got so much time in front of the mirror in the morning. If you leave the red zits alone and go to school then they get really big and everybody can see the pearl under the skin and they make jokes. Pizza face. Balloon factory.

It's always dark when he comes in. I used to have a night light, but when I turned thirteen a year ago, he said, "Now you're a teenager. You're all grown up, and you don't need that little light anymore. That's for scared little kids."

It's always dark when the door opens, so I see the light from down in the front hall, faint and yellow, leaving a



giant fuzzy shadow of him dark across the ceiling. Then he slips inside and the light goes away again, and that's when I stop hearing-myself, no breathing, no blood moving through my ears to let me know my heart's still beating. I hear the click of the door closing, and I hear his feet as they slap the hardwood floor and pad across the rag rug by my bed, and I smell his soap and his aftershave and a little hint of Mom's perfume because he's been lying close to her.

I never move after I hear the door click shut.

By the time he reaches the bed his breathing is harsher and louder than it ever is during the day. He lifts the sheet and the blanket and the spread. The linen whispers against itself. The cold air goose bumps across my arms and legs.

I am asleep, I tell myself. I am a piece of stone. I am dead. I don't breathe and I don't move. I can't.

I never move after I hear the door click shut.

I have been lying on my back, my arms and legs straight, locked tight. He turns me away from him and bends my hips and knees and slides in behind me and pulls my nightie out of his way.

I used to sit on his lap. It used to stay flat.

I don't move, but he moves me, and he moves around

me and in me.

I click my brain off, because tomorrow I'll have to kiss him good-bye at the breakfast table, just like Mom does.

When he's finished and I am messy, he whispers that if I ever tell Mom about this her heart will break and she'll die. If I ever tell anybody else they might tell Mom and her heart will break and she'll die.

He leaves. After a long time, my brain clicks back on, and I get up and shower and change the sheets and go back to bed and drop into sleep like it was a cliff I fell over.

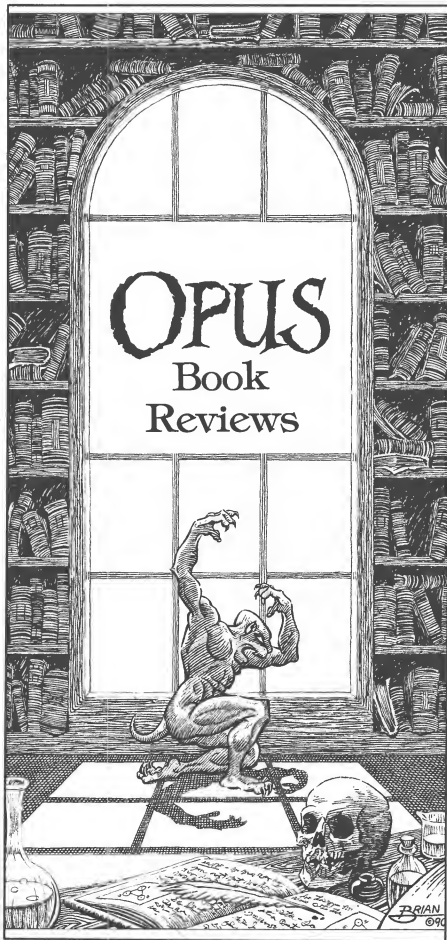
My heart breaks, and I don't die.

When a zit gets big enough, you can pop it.

I've been sharpening a knitting needle on a whetstone I found in a drawer in the kitchen. This zit is one of the red ones. It's not big enough yet, even though the bleeding stopped three months ago. I don't want to wait for it to show. Though sometimes I think about the pearl forming in there, and wonder if it is worth more than I am.

I think I'll slide the needle in through my belly button tonight, before he gets here.

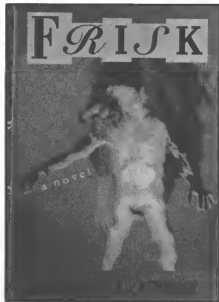
Nina Kiriki Hoffman is the sixth of seven children. She spent her formative years in Santa Barbara before it became a soap opera. Her short fiction has appeared in *Pulphouse*, *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, *Assimov's*, *Analog*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and a bunch of horror anthologies. Forthcoming works include a young adult novel written in collaboration with Tad Williams called *Child of an Ancient City*. She lives in Eugene, Oregon.



OPUS

Book Reviews

by
Linda Marotta



Frisk

by Dennis Cooper
128 pp, Grove Weidenfeld
\$17.95

Critics of horror fiction often assume that fans and writers who concern themselves with forbidden delights and taboo topics must themselves be rather bent. Just how dangerous is this fascination with the edge? In *Frisk*, Dennis Cooper's third novel, real and fictional horror fold in upon one another like some mad Escher sketch. In the center dwells a gay man named Dennis (like the author), who is obsessed with a sadistic impulse to slaughter the young men with whom he sleeps. While the main character's superficiality and flat descriptions of butchery will invite comparisons to *American Psycho*, *Frisk* focuses on the *desire* to perform violent acts rather than the acts themselves, making it much scarier and more personal to the innocent reader with a wicked imagination.

At the age of thirteen, Dennis spends his Saturday afternoons watching monster movies and thumbing through skin mags at a local store. One day the store's manager asks if he would like to see some pictures that might scare him a little. "I'd just seen a creature from

outer space tear apart buildings, etc., so I said sure." These photos, of a seemingly dead, tortured young boy, will haunt him forever. Cooper's description of the boy's exploded ass ("At its center's a pit, or a small tunnel entrance, too out-of-focus to exactly explore with one's eyes, but too mysterious not to want to try.") invites us all to look behind that locked door of homosexual s&m.

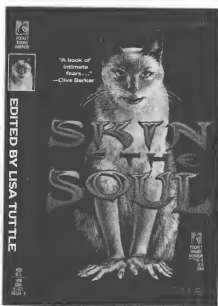
As a teenager, Dennis and his friend, Julian, often engage in two-on-ones with drugged young studs. At twenty-four he spends some time as a punk, during which he beats up his first victim. With the advent of AIDS and friends dying all around him, Dennis finds it hard to come to terms with real death. He admits that death has become so sanitized and glamorized by the television and films of our depersonalized culture that he finds it more natural to immerse himself in morbid masturbatory fantasies than to mourn. Preferring his relationships to remain distant, he screws only hustlers and starts to fantasize about the ultimate orgasm of death during sex. As he prods, fingers, sucks and sniffs, he longs to dissect his partners in order to savor their true mysteries. This desire to understand his objectified partners never goes beyond the physical: "I want him, specifically his skin, because that's the only thing that's available."

Besides Dennis and his friends ("predators and aesthetes") we also hear from the vulnerable victims themselves. As one young masochist and fan of splatter films, named Joe, explains: "I tend to experience things, even weird things like violence, as forms of information about what or who I am physically." When Joe turns up dead, physically, Dennis uses the case as material for an "artsy murder-mystery" parts of which Cooper excerpts in the book. In an even more obvious analogy, he juxtaposes 'meat shots' of a boy getting fucked in a theater's balcony, smiling contentedly as an observer describes Freddy Krueger's on-screen antics to him.

Finally, Dennis moves to Amsterdam and apparently starts tearing up bodies for real. He writes to his old friend to come join him and share in "this major transcendence or answer I've found in killing cute guys." One murder he describes is so brutal, the an-

nihilated body is reduced to gruesome chunks and smears by Dennis' inquisitive touch.

Frisk works well as an examination of one man's fantasies and morality, but we learn little of the causes or psychology behind his sexual identity and sadistic inclinations. Mere fixation on a couple of photographs alone would have truly disturbing (and probably unintentional) implications. The book's strength lies in the constant tension and material difference between imaginary and actual horror; a difference bridged through desire; a difference that the surprising ending makes as real to the reader as the sudden realization of the weight of a book in one's hands when the story is over.



Skin of the Soul

edited by Lisa Tuttle
288 pp, Pocket Books
\$4.50

Many readers and writers don't get the point of all-women anthologies. They grumble that good writing is good writing and seem to think that female equality is a *fait accompli*. Well, it's not. I happen to be in favor of a little affirmative action and think that horror fiction which addresses the concerns of one half of the population broadens everyone's horizons and adds even more richness to the ever fertile field of fear. Lisa Tuttle's eloquent introduction to *Skin of the Soul* addresses many of the current gender

issues in the field and explains the need for greater exposure of female horror writers. She is well qualified for the job, having seen it all before as a science-fiction author when that genre was experiencing its own growing pains.

Some of the seventeen collected writers in *Skin of the Soul* are established in horror, some in other fields and some are brand new, but all demonstrate horror's particular ability to join subjective and physical realities -- the soul/skin connection. In these stories, disempowered women struggle with horrible mind monsters and unwanted psychic gifts. Little girls promise not to tell and lose control of their menstruating bodies. Quite a few of the tales are excruciatingly personal and made my own scars twitch and ache. Each is followed by a short afterward in which the author explains her idea behind the story and often her thoughts about horror as well. The afterwards are almost all fascinating and particularly effective toward the collection's overall goal of freeing female voices. (In a few cases, they are actually better than the stories themselves.)

The first, and one of the best, is Melanie Tem's "Lightning Rod," in which a mother's deeply scarred chest jolts us with the harm done by *not* letting loved ones feel their own pain. In Suzy McKee Charnas' "Boobs," changing into a wolf is way better than changing into a teenager. ("People can be awfully nasty, but they sure taste sweet.") Cherry Wilder's gory "Anzac Day" nauseates with the queasy taste of truth when a helpless woman and her children must depend upon an insane ex-soldier. "The Night Wolf," by Karen Joy Fowler is an innocently told tale of child abuse, so heartwrenching, it was difficult to finish reading. Lisa Tuttle examines the gooeey, gummy flesh-ectoplasm-spirit connection in "Mr. Elphinstone's Hands" and Sherry Coldsmit's powerful "Ticnanu's Child" looks at incest through Native American spiritualism. A very special treat is Joyce Carol Oates' afterward to her surreal "miniature narrative" entitled "Pregnant." She beautifully illuminates the art of horror and fittingly demurs from examining it too closely.

The painful intimacy of these stories suggests that horror may in fact be the perfect medium through which a

suppressed group may describe its tragic experiences. As a genre, horror is still young and going through a transitional period away from its historical white male domination. (Pocket's confusing and hideous cover indicates they had no idea how to represent this volume.) Women's voices, at least, are starting to increase in volume. Ms. Tuttle's impassioned plea to editors, critics and readers for variety and vigilance doesn't criticize male-oriented works but cautions that "when they lose sight of the existence of an encultured male bias and mistake it for universal 'human nature'; when they forget there are other ways of being and feeling...then we're all imprisoned by their limitations, and horror becomes another kind of pornography." Go ahead, girl! I never did buy that *Brotherhood of Mankind* shit.



Needful Things The Last Castle Rock Story

by Stephen King
640 pp, Viking
\$24.95

Hercule Poirot. Dune. Misery Chastain. Robin, the Boy Wonder. Why would a writer choose to annihilate a beloved recurring creation? Boredom? Curiosity? Perversity? Maybe because it's fun -- a challenge in creative destruction. In the case of *Needful Things*, one suspects all of the above. The town of Castle Rock is to many Stephen King stories

what the U.S.S. Enterprise (another casualty) is to Star Trek. But King isn't just blowing up his G.I. Joes here. Threatening this comfortable setting enables him to effectively examine the limits of human fallibility and resiliency. The result is a vivid and often hilarious portrait of a most familiar small town and the aggregate effect of minor sins compounded by major Evil.

Castle Rock may appear to be your typically peaceful "Hicksville, USA," but like any soap opera town, from Peyton Place to Twin Peaks, there clings a seamy underside, teeming with secret tragedies, petty feuds and hidden addictions. The novel opens like the *Music Man*, on an everyday kinda town with everyday kinda troubles. Then a Stranger arrives and opens up a shop called "Needful Things" with more on sale than phony boys' bands. Like Shadwell from *Weaveworld* or Mr. Dark from *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Leland Gaunt trades in "the things which haunt the dreams of men and women."

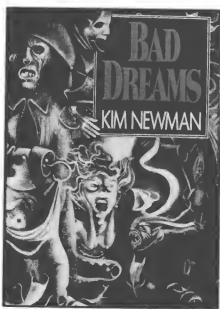
The way Gaunt sees it, the most innocent appearing of communities is actually a powderkeg waiting for the proper hot-wiring to set it off. Through a series of Faustian deals, he trades his curios and collectibles in return for a series of practical jokes to be played on chosen citizens of the Rock. He taps into their unresolved hopes and sorrows, then watches as normal God-fearing folk turn into the selfish, suspicious creatures he knew were there all along. He knows exactly which buttons to push and his carefully planned pranks ignite the fuses of smoldering rivalries all across town. In no time he has everyone running around town leaving notes, slashing tires and telling white lies. ("Humanity! So humble! So willing to sacrifice the other fellow!") Although Gaunt's hypnotic sales technique gives him a rather unfair advantage, when it comes to the ultimate consumer seduction, *everyone* has got a price.

As usual in a King story, the characters are well-drawn and instantly familiar. And like the Rock itself, they've all got ghosts they're trying to get over. Sheriff Alan Pangborn is the one person Gaunt knows well enough to avoid. Pangborn's keepers of observation come from his years as a law officer, his pre-

vious brush with the supernatural (*The Dark Half*) and his amateur magician talents. (Like the Amazing Randi, Gaunt suspects it will take a sleight-of-hand charlatan to debunk one.)

As this portrait of a small town under supernatural attack unfolds character by character, we get to see them each express emotions from ecstasy to insane rage. King really seems to enjoy putting the screws to his simple folk and it's easy to get caught up in the fun. Finally, the neighborly bickering builds to a murderous crescendo as housewives take to the streets with meat cleavers and bodies pile up. *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* becomes *Armageddon American Style* in the spectacular and cathartic finale. Though not as grand in scope as *The Stand* or emotionally riveting as *Misery*, *Needful Things* is a thoroughly enjoyable celebration of the tragicomic nature of existence and the dual nature of free will.

Have we really seen the last of Castle Rock and its inhabitants? We once thought the same thing about Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Spock and Bobby Ewing. But sometimes they come back.



Bad Dreams

by Kim Newman
280 pp, Carroll & Graf
\$18.95

Kim Newman's mind is a veritable vault of cinematic information and imagination. His *Nightmare Movies* was a fasci-

nating and valuable critique of the genre while *The Night Mayor* interfaced the conventions of film noir and cyberpunk onto a brilliantly realized dreamscape. Unfortunately, his latest work, and first horror novel, *Bad Brains*, lacks polish and reads like a disorganized first writing attempt. There are flashes of brilliance here and there, but overall it's as disappointing as the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films it seemingly mimics.

Basically, one morning, journalist Anne Nelson is called to identify her prostitute sister's torn, desiccated and prematurely aged body. She decides to investigate and spends the rest of the day playing dangerous dream games with Skinner, the bad guy. Skinner belongs to a vampiric race called the Kind. He can rearrange his physical form, astral project and must feed on humans to keep from shriveling up. His diet includes flesh, blood and something called "dreamstuffs." Nothing is very well explained but he seems to be a Freddy Kruegeresque soul-swallower.

During the fifties, Skinner was a congressman involved in the communist witch-hunts which brought down Anne's father, a Nobel prize winning playwright. He'd sworn vengeance on their family because a beautiful female Elder once snubbed him in favor of the playwright. Flashbacks include a funny sendup of Joseph McCarthy ("Tail Gunner Joe"), Roy Cohn ("the Lawyer"), and Ayn Rand ("the Objectivist"). It's amusing, but the weakly animated 'Cast' drags through their performances making the book read like an outline that hasn't yet been fleshed out. A sleazy drug dealer works in "the Business" and Anne refers to Skinner as "the Monster." She may as well be called 'the Heroine' for all we care about her or have the slightest doubt about how she'll end up.

The one place Newman's talent does shine is in the set-pieces of "the Dream." In one interlude, Anne's brother dreams a detailed Hollywood movie future in which everyone in the family, including his son, Cameron Nielson III, achieves artistic success except for him. ("On the *Tonight Show*, Johnny Carson did a whole monologue on the theme of, 'yes, but who is Cameron Nielson the Second?'" Anne later gets

trapped in an alternate-future loop as a character in her father's play. These surrogate personalities and plots (a concept used to full advantage in *The Night Mayor*) are far more interesting and well thought-out than the rest of the book; but even they don't appear until more than halfway through. His creativity soars through the dream scenes and droops when weighted down by the constraints of gravity and real-time.

But nobody can beat Newman when it comes to playing with the conventions of film. Movie stars pop in and out as the cliché demands, adding a clever dimension of trivial pursuit for alert film buffs. ("When he had got up in the Senate with his list of 'card-carrying Communists,' he had been thinking of Mr. Smith.") *Bad Dreams* may not be Newman's breakout horror novel, but it's definitely getting there. Keep watching the skies.

GHASTLY GIFT BOOKS

Torment in Art: Pain, Violence and Martyrdom

by Lionello Puppi (Rizzoli, \$75) Twelfth to nineteenth century depictions of torture and execution. Political atrocities by Goya, medieval studies of decomposition, Bruegel's fields of death, and an eye-gouging by Rembrandt. Unromanticized blood fountains from severed heads, bodies are sawn in half lengthwise and gory crucifixions are colorfully detailed. Excruciating and glorious.

Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America

by Stanley B. Burns (Twelvevrees Press, \$40) Nineteenth century postmortem photographers advertised: "Secure the Shadow, 'Ere the Substance Fades'" This stunning collection of 76 photographs (daguerreotypes, silver prints) of the dearly departed includes a lost looking twin posing with his deceased brother, a dead train robber holding his holster and many parents cradling their stiffening children. At the back are descriptive cap-

tions and a chronology of American death from 1630 to 1990. More than just a book of dead guys, it challenges modern death taboos with its *memento mori* from a time when death and grieving were more culturally accepted.

The Illustrated History of Horror Comics

by Mike Benton (Taylor Publishing Company, \$21.95) "Feast your eyeballs on comics guaranteed to leave you senseless with delight!" Uncle Creepy in *Creepy* #1. Drooling corpses menace gasping babes in between Benton's hilarious history spanning early crime comics to sophisticated graphic novels. Illuminating side-bars expand on horror hosts, Poe comics, giant monster names (Fin Fang Foom?) and Comics Code standards ("No comic magazine shall use the word 'horror' or 'terror' in its title."). Gore-dripping color covers on every page! It's a must.

Days of the Dead

(Collins Publishers San Francisco, \$16.95) Photography by John Greenleigh. Text (bilingual English/Spanish) by Rosalind Rosoff Beimler. The Mexican *Día de los Muertos* is "a ritual that is at once respectful and mocking of death and, in the end, reaffirming of human life." This book beautifully documents all aspects of the holiday from the care of the gravesites and preparation of the skeletal sweets and toys to the wild celebration and peaceful allnight vigil. 90 color photographs.

Dead Ends: An irreverent Field Guide to the Graves of the Famous

edited by David Cross and Robert Bent (Plume, \$8.95) Over 500 entries on the famous and infamous with short bios, cause of death and location of remains. Includes the Bros. Grimm, Harvey Milk, Bill W., Lizzie Borden, Bruce Lee, and Frida Kahlo. Smokey the Bear was a charred bear cub! Abbie Hoffman's ashes rest on top of a TV set! Alphabetically and geographically arranged, makes an excellent holiday planning guide, reference of the ghost realm and final word on Where Are They Now?

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Shadowlands News & Updates

...edited by Ellen Datlow

A *Whisper of Blood*, the follow-up to the World Fantasy Award nominated vampirism anthology *Blood is not Enough*, is to be published October 31st, by William Morrow. Contributors to this anthology include Thomas Ligotti, Thomas Tessier, K.W. Jeter, Jack Womack, Pat Cadigan, Suzie McKee Charnas, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and Jonathon Carroll. In this anthology (all original but three), Datlow takes the idea of *vampirism* -- "the draining of energy, the sucking of the will, the life force itself" -- to the limit.

Also, available now (St. Martin's) is *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fourth Annual Collection*, co-edited by Datlow with Terri Windling. The first two collections won the World Fantasy Award.

And watch for *Snow White, Blood Red*, an anthology of updated adult fairy tales, also co-edited with Terri Windling. It's finished and handed in to its publisher, William Morrow.

Rock & Horror

The first anthology of rock & roll and horror, *Shock Rock* edited by Jeff Gelb (Pocket Books), is to be published in January 1992.

Its hard hitting line-up is headlined with a foreword by Alice Cooper (of course!), and includes starring acts, Stephen King, David J. Schow, Richard Christian Matheson, John Shirley, F. Paul Wilson, Thomas Tessier, Graham Masterton, and the best opening acts ever to hit the stage of the page. It covers everything from possessed guitars to MTV music videos, from DJs to bootlegs, from dead musicians coming back for one last show to time travel to, of course, the quintessential "rock is the devil's music" story.

Gelb has spent his entire career in the music industry, first in radio, then at a music trade publication, and is co-editor of the horror anthology *Hot Blood*. So, if anyone has an ear for this stuff, it's Gelb.

update: SLEEPWALKERS

Columbia, Written by Stephen King, Directed by Mick Garris

Are you ready for this? Sleepwalkers stars Alice Krige (Ghost Story) with featured cast members Mädchen Amick (Twin Peaks), Brian Krause, Ron Pearlman (Beauty and the Beast), and Cynthia Garris (Psycho 4). And check out this list of cameo appearances; Directors John Landis, Joe Dante, Tobie Hooper, and -- Clive Barker, Stephen King, and Mark Hamill. We have word that Director Mick Garris is very pleased with the film thus far and he tells us King is also.

SCREAMS FROM THE MASSES

Letters

Dear Iniquities,

I've just finished reading your Craig Spector interview for the 23.5th time (I only had time to half of it yesterday) and I cannot get enough of this fascinating guy. Both Skipp & Spector bring to the horror field much deserved intelligence and realism. Do they accept fan mail? And, if so, may I contact them c/o their publisher? You see, recently I've suffered a "Barker-burnout," so I decided to try the S.P. clan, and I'm more than satisfied with this choice.

I don't mean to give the impression that I demand gore and violence from my reading material, but let's face it, a majority of horror writers today tend to play too safe.

I wish Skipp & Spector could've lectured at my college, it would've been nice to see someone else there who likes to wear a leather jacket and sunglasses.

sincerely,
"Dirty" Mary S.

Dear "Dirty" Mary,

A) Glad you liked the interview, and we hope we can feed your insatiable appetite with this issue. There's lots of S&S in it.

B) Yes, they accept fan mail. You can address it to us at the address in the masthead. We'll be sure they get it.

C) Never let loose of Clive. Put some ointment on that burn.

D) What's wrong with demanding more gore and violence in your reading materials?

E) You never know ...so you better get ready, they may be comin' to your town.

F) What does the "Dirty" mean?

Dear Mr. Venable,

We met recently at the HWA convention in Redondo Beach, California earlier this year. I just have a few bones to pick with you. Sure, INIQUITIES is a great magazine and keeps getting better all the time. I've been a subscriber since the first issue. But God knows why you are now associated with such a cool magazine. Granted, your talent as Managing Editor shows in the escalation of quality from the first to second issue, but you're a jerk!

I've met J. F. Gonzalez and Buddy Martinez, who, thank God, are your superiors, and they come across as down-to-earth, likable characters. If I were them, I would find a replacement that not only did great work with the magazine, but was also courteous to fans of INIQUITIES. Maybe if you got a personality overhaul, and were not so

rude, you might be able to get somewhere in life.

Sincerely,
Robert L. Johnson
Torrance, CA

Well, Zack?

Dear Editors,

I liked "Rockin' the Midnight Hour" by Anya Martin in #2, but was surprised that so many of today's most powerful horror bands were not mentioned.

I'm referring specifically to what's commonly called "Industrial Rock". Skinny Puppy was mentioned in passing, true, but hearing what they do lets you know right away that they should not just be passed over. A listen to their album "Rabies" will convince any skeptic that rock horror not only exists—it screams...

Similarly, Front Line Assembly, Numb, Controlled Bleeding, Coi, Klinik, Nocturnal Emissions, and a number of other artists have created some of the most somber, downbeat and horrific music in the rock repertoire. (Besides "Rabies", I recommend Numb's "Christmeister", Front Line Assembly's "The Initial Command", Coi's "Gold is the Metal", Klinik's "Face-to-Face Fever", and Controlled Bleeding's "Songs from the Grinding Wall" and "Trudge.")

This stuff may not be what the writers mentioned in Ms. Martin's piece listen to, but without question, it can and does provide many a soul with dark inspiration. Listen and believe!

And it's invisible; most of the time, when writers compare rock and horror, they refer either to bands of yore (Doors, Alice Cooper, etc) or today's thrash or heavy metal bands. Industrial rock is akin to what Doug Winter called "anti-horror" in an interesting sidebar article in the October 1988 issue of *Twilight Zone* magazine. It answers the question, Hey? What happens if musicians older than teenagers get pissed off at life, fed, up, disgusted, really depressed?

Food for thought, perhaps. And you know what Shakespeare (almost) said - "If music be the food of non-love, play on..."

'Scuse me while I return to my CD player--

Sincerely,
Lawrence Greenberg
Noo Yawk

Dear Lawrence,

Point well taken, and had Anya Martin's article been much more expansive, she may have included a lot of the bands you mentioned. But being that her article was focused mainly on the listening habits of the four writers in the article and what they listen to when they write, the need for an extensive playlist was not necessary. But who knows, maybe the bands you mentioned will be on their playlist now.

Dear Editors,

In regards to the Craig Spector interview; GREAT STUFF! It's not often a writer opens himself up so much in an interview and it was a refreshing new perspective. I actually haven't read the John Skipp interview yet, but if it's as good, I'll get right on it.

Actually, to be honest, I haven't read any of the first issue yet. Well, to be completely honest, I don't have it. Is it still available? If so, I'll be sending my check pronto.

I thoroughly enjoyed *Iniquities* #2, and look forward to future issues.

Sincerely,
Tod Hartford
Modesto, CA

Dear Tod,

Issue #1 is still available, check out our ad on page 40. And thanks for the cool comments.

Send your letters attention : *Screams From the Masses* to address below.

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WITH NOTHING TREMBLES

a poem based on a line from Shakespeare's "RICHARD II"

by Ray Bradbury

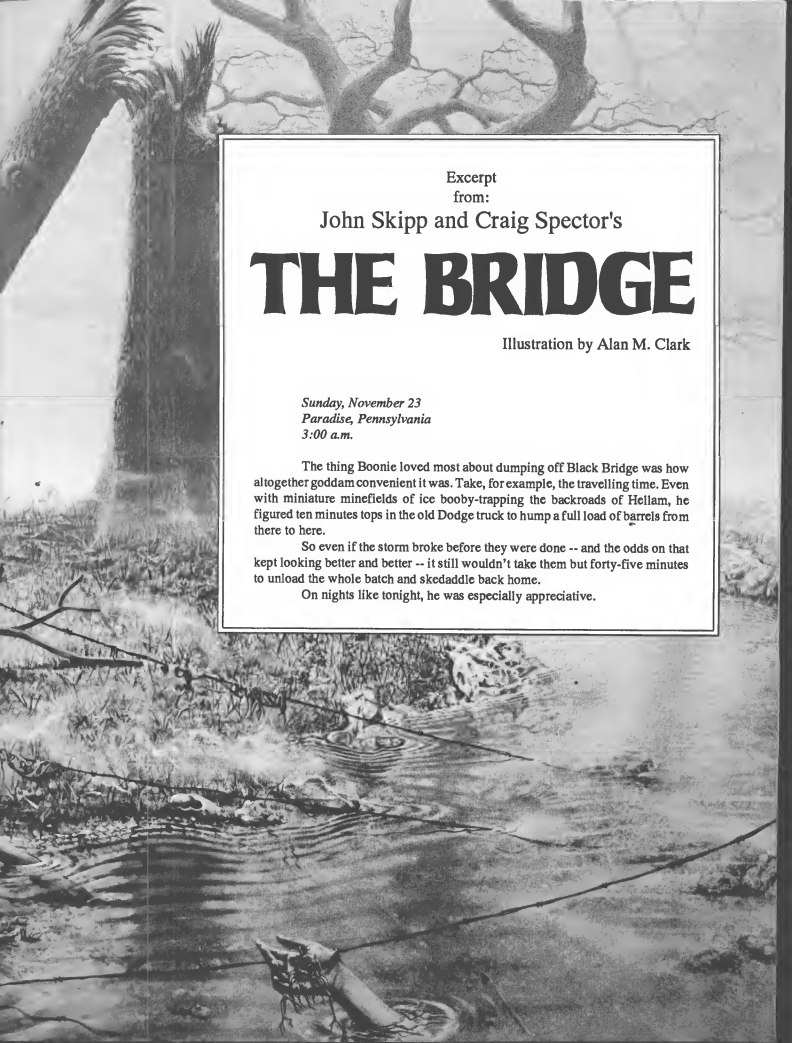
With Nothing trembles.
Or so the good King sensed or said;
In husbanding some twilight Death
Or surgeon to a birthing dream
Of night.
His fright was Nothingness.
Unreason with its vaped skills
Did summon him,
Unseen,
To kills.
So keen its message,
Yet its flesh Nowhere;
Its very air, while motionless,
Sharp-honed a knife
To scalpel half-a-heart
Of heartless life.
No phantom beckoned him;
E'en Hamlet's father's Ghost
Could boast much more of reckoning his son
To spare a moment's ear
To hear and know
His father's mourn
Before the first cockcrow.
Not even that! No Arctic spirit
Exquisitely laced up in ice
Did pale King know
No storm, no change, no colling wind,
Did quake him till a crack
Seamed down his back:
No, none of that!
But Nil and Nothing's
Lack of temperature,

Illustration by J.K. Potter

All breezeless breeze
Knocked without knocking
In unshaken trees.
Nor did rank tomb-dust rise,
Consumed, a blight,
To scour his eyes.
Mere blurring of his sight
With Nothing stirring
Made him sad
And then with bloody sadness shelved on sadness
Teased him mad.
Whilst nothing moved,
For even clocks held stiff their prongs
To still bell-songs untelling time
As bone-dust sand in hourglass skull unfiltered went,
And birds, unsinging of themselves,
Unlearned their songs,
Nor yearned to vent a note,
While clouds, a-fermenting the sky,
Gave up ferment.
Amidst this storm of silence,
Lack of substance,
Fleshless haunting,
Phantom boats struck still
In ocean with no tide,
The dark King then at joy dissembled
To mate, abed, with seedless dread.
Not there at all, unborn, undead;
And so, with nothing trembled.

Ray Bradbury's early short fiction appeared in *Weird Tales* in the early 1940's. Many of those early works were reprinted in his first collection *Dark Carnival* (1947). Since then, he has gone on to produce an endless amount of unforgettable novels, short stories, plays, essays, screenplays, and poetry. He is the author of *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*, *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *The October Country*, *A Graveyard for Lunatics*, *The Halloween Tree*, and countless other stories of horror, fantasy, and science fiction.





Excerpt
from:
John Skipp and Craig Spector's

THE BRIDGE

Illustration by Alan M. Clark

*Sunday, November 23
Paradise, Pennsylvania
3:00 a.m.*

The thing Boonie loved most about dumping off Black Bridge was how altogether goddam convenient it was. Take, for example, the travelling time. Even with miniature minefields of ice booby-trapping the backroads of Hellam, he figured ten minutes tops in the old Dodge truck to hump a full load of barrels from there to here.

So even if the storm broke before they were done -- and the odds on that kept looking better and better -- it still wouldn't take them but forty-five minutes to unload the whole batch and skedaddle back home.

On nights like tonight, he was especially appreciative.

THE BRIDGE

Not that they'd seen many nights quite like this.

"Jesus," Boonie spat out, grinning. "Would you look at that shit." He jabbed one oversized thumb at the clouds, hanging swollen and gray in the black sky overhead. His other hand gripped the wheel in a casual stranglehold, steering by intuition. "They look like big dead ugly brains, you know it? Like the whole sky is made out of brains..."

"Let's just go back, man," Drew muttered from the passenger seat, bulging lemur eyes aglisten with crystal meth and anxiety. "Do it tomorrow or something. We can't work in this shit."

Boonie scowled, dodged a pothole. "You're such a fuckin' wiener, Drew. You don't like the storm? I love it, man."

The sky went *kaboom* and neon-flickered, winter lightning twitching to the angry rowl of God. Drew jumped and shivered. It was funny as hell. "I love this shit," Boonie reaffirmed, gazing ahead at their destination.

Black Bridge loomed before them, stark against the violent, primal sky. It didn't need anyone's help to rate as ultimate creature feature territory. It was a brooding, decrepit old railroad crossing, limned by crumbling stone and situated smack-dab in the middle of nowhere; a rusting dinosaur from the days when trains were the lifeblood, steel rails the veins of Paradise County and the nation.

Black Bridge loomed before them, stark against the violent, primal sky.

A generation of disuse had left it overgrown, flanked by bleached bony trees, choked with kudzu and dense, gnarled undergrowth. Many of the ties had long gone punky and worm-holed, but its poured concrete pylons and steel beams still held, casting fat lightning-shadows on the murky green waters of the Codorus Creek, some thirty feet below.

The only way in was via Toad Road, a bumpy, chuck-holed dirt access barely wide enough to accommodate the overloaded truck. Snaking through the verdant green valley at the east end of the county, Toad Road went unmarked and appeared on none but the most anal tax maps of the county, which pretty much sewed up the privacy angle. By day, it was home only to dopers, dirtbikers and hunters looking to poach an off-season deer or two.

By night, no one came there at all.

Yep, Boonie loved everything about this place: its proximity, its privacy, its dread-inducing atmosphere. But the thing he loved most was the simple fact that if you pulled right up in the middle of the bridge and angled the back until your

ass hung over the side, you could sorta just lean the barrels off the back and let fly straight into the creek. Fuckers never even had to come down off the bed. That cut down on a lot of the really heavy lifting, which was the worst part of the job, except maybe for the smell.

Bradley Gene Pusser -- "Boonie" to his friends -- was a twenty-five year-old, six foot four-inch two hundred and forty-seven pound mountain of ugly intent. His flapjawed, aging-Elvis features were pasty and unpleasant, eyes sullen and bulging under the brim of his blue Steelers cap. Along with his size and his nasty disposition, he'd inherited the Pusser genetic penchant toward alcoholism, pattern baldness and flab.

All told, life had been one steep, harsh downhill slide since the end of his high school football career. For a while there, back in the glory days, he'd been able to entertain dreams, of scholarships and pro-ball and an permanent all-expense paid ticket out of this pisshole town. His coach believed, his teammates believed, the nookie-nookiecandass cheerleaders believed and god damn if his own *daddy* -- the verable Otis J., Jr. -- hadn't come to believe that a Pusser had been born who could break the chain and bust on through to some kind of success.

But when his right kneecap vaporized late in the season of his senior year, so had his ticket out of town, and his dreams. Suddenly, the calls from Penn State and Indiana dried up; his name disappeared from the local sports pages; and Otis -- who'd taken to telling everyone within earshot that his boy was gonna go big-time -- suddenly Boonie and Otis the whole goddam family had to bite the bullet and own up to the facts: no Pusser was ever gonna amount to a hill of shit.

And Boonie would always be a Pusser.

From that moment on, he'd thrown himself into the family business with a vengeance, working long and hard to make his Daddy proud again. It was dirty work, but it paid cash money, and Pussers weren't shy where there was money to be made. In fact, business had boomed since Boonie took over the grunt work, leaving Otis to preside over public relations and pursue his hobby of stargazing through the bottom of a Jim Beam bottle.

On the other hand, there was cousin Drew.

"Here we go, cuz," Boonie said, pulling up to the point where the road met the railroad tracks. He grunted, shoving the truck into low gear. It was hard to maneuver in this much darkness; even the headlights were swallowed up by the storm. He laid on the gas and eased off the clutch, careful to roll up onto the tracks without losing the load.

"Watch out!" Drew whined, his adam's apple bobbing. He was the runt of Uncle Bud's litter, a complete genetic one-eighty from the rest of the menfolk in the Pusser family tree. At twenty years old, he was as much a man as he was ever likely to be: knock-kneed and scrawny, with a chicken-bone chest and a cratered, crescentmoon face. His hair was a black matted oillslick that trickled down way past his shoulders. He

wore a black leather jacket and little fingerless gloves, a greasy Harley T-shirt, and tons of biker gear, though he didn't own a bike and wouldn't have known how to ride it if he did.

Drew's contact sport of choice was a little liquid crystal video game that he wore on his digital watch. It had an eensy little jet that bombed a teensy little city; every time he dropped a bomb, it played a weensy wheedling melody.

The truck lurched again, jostling them so hard that Drew's head rapped the ceiling. "Boonie!" he whined.

"Fuck you, puss. Hang on," Boonie growled. The truck groaned and gnashed gears, big knobby tires biting into rotted ties. The barrels shifted hard but stayed.

"This place, you know, it really makes me fuckin' nervous." He diddled with his watch. *Weedle eedle eee*, it said. *Weedle eedle eee...*

"Would you cut it out?" Boonie barked. "God, I hate that thing!"

"Fuck you, man," Drew sniffled. "This is modern technology at its finest, dude!"

Weedle eedle eedle eeeee...

He smirked, and there went the last of Boonie's patience. He pegged Drew's skinny little jut-jawed profile with a straight-arm flat-hand blow, square to the side of the head. Drew's skull cracked painfully against the passenger side glass; he bit down on his tongue hard enough to spritz blood.

"Ow! *Fug* you, Bood! I'b dellin'!" he whined, gripping his cheek.

"Swear to God, Drew, if you don't stuff it I'm gonna fuckin' leave you here and keep your share of the money."

Drew started to counter, then abruptly and visibly changed his mind. He knew well enough, from previous experience, that Boonie was not fooling.

For his part, Boonie found it downright gratifying to watch Drew fold like that. It gave him a nice warm feeling inside. So he decided to be magnanimous. "Here ya peckerhead. Got a surprise for ya."

Boonie produced a reedy little joint from his jacket pocket. "Just what the doctor ordered. Fire 'er up."

"Thangs," Drew sniffled, taking the doob.

"We dump this load, I'll cut us a couple lines," Boonie said paternally. "In the meantime, I suggest you stoke up, 'cause we got work to do."

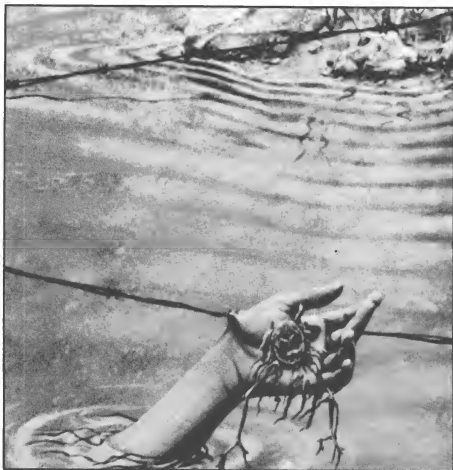
Boonie layed on the brakes and brought the truck to a shuddering halt, then gnashed it into reverse and humped over the tracks until the tailgate was butt up against the lip of the rail. The positioning was perfect. He left the engine running against the cold and stared out over his domain.

Above him, the heavens thundered, so close Boonie could feel it in the soles of his shoes. A flash of lightning seared the night sky. "*BLOOOH-HA HA!*" Boonie cackled, his features glowing green in the dashboard light. The first fat raindrops spattered the windshield.

At last, the storm had broken.

The Codorus had long been a sin-eater for the Industrial Revolution: a chemical cessway, accepting and dispensing with the intemperate by-products of the good life. Defense plants, research laboratories, factory farms, electroplate shops, paper mills, and landfills routinely decanted their excreta there. As such, even in the days before Boonie, it was already laced with "acceptable" levels of a thousand wild-card contagions: leads, cyanides, arsenics, alkalies, chlorinated hydrocarbons, dioxins, trioxans, trichlorophenol residues, poisons, and pesticides galore.

But now there was a rusting graveyard under the



THE BRIDGE

waters beneath Black Bridge: tons upon tons of crushed drums and rotting husks, choking the space beneath the muddy surface. Most had long since popped their corks, but quite a few were still intact: fifty-five gallon pockets of concentrated death, corroding the barrels from either side and then suppurating into the slipstream.

Carcinogens settled in its silt, drifting lazily on their way to the river and the sea; mutagens skinned its sluggish surface, quietly rearranging the molecular building blocks of everything they touched. Carp and harder garbage eaters slid through its murky currents: gills siphoning oxygen, stockpiling pestilence.

Mindlessly laying their eggs.

Black Bridge was a toxic ground zero, an industrial Instant Primordial Stew. Only one century in the making, and already as rich as the brew from which all life-as-we-know-it sprang. Across the country, across the globe, countless thousands just like it lay dormant and sleeping.

It was only a matter of time before the next wake-up call.

At 3:27 that morning, it came.

* * *

"BOMB'S AWAY!" Boonie cried, and rolled another one down the chute.

"Bombs away!" Drew reiterated, dropping the gate. It juttied over the rail like a stumpy steel diving board.

The rain came down in earnest now, cold and wet and steady.

A cobalt blue fifty-five gallon drum stenciled DANGER rumbled down the slight incline of the truck bed, then off and into the blackness below. There was a beat of silence as gravity took over, then a deep wet *thwump* almost musical in timbre as it broke the creek's surface like a cannonball. A plume of water shot high into the air, then rained back down in a pelting, misty spray.

"Bull's eye!" Drew cackled as he turned around. "Fuckin' aye!" He was stoned as a bastard now, relaxing behind the job. With his red bandanna pulled up over his nose to cut the fumes, he looked like a cross between Bazooka Joe and the Frito Bandito.

"Awright! Drewie gets a woody!" Boonie bellowed, through his own paisley kerchief. "Shit, cuz, I knew you'd come 'round!"

The rain came down in earnest now, cold and wet and

steady. And warm, Boonie noted; stranglely out of place, a summer storm snaking up from nowhere to thread through the chill November night. The warring fronts slammed together like invisible giants. Warm rain hit cold ground and hissed like whispering voices.

Boonie left his cab door open anyway, the better to hear the radio. Starview 92 classic rock was layin' down some fine old Allman Brothers, and they had the volume cranked to Brother Greg's moody classic, "Midnight Rider".

Yeah, man, Drew smiled to himself, nodding in time with the tune. *That's exactly who we are. We're the fuckin' midnight riders, man.* It gave him a little surge of pride, made him feel real good about himself.

In fact, Drew was feeling fine. Never Better. They were soaked, but it was great; a warm wind whipping around them, the whole world glowing and pulsing in time with the music.

Boonie was trading air guitar licks with the late great Brother Duane. Drew grinned at him and sucked on the joint through his impromptu mask. It gave him a toothless shadow mouth. He toked again and sucked the scarf full into his mouth, went *bluh bluh bluh* through the red cotton maw. Goddam, but he was funny sometimes.

His lips began to tingle.

The song ended, segued into "Riders on the Storm." "Okay!" Boonie hollered. "Ready up! Only thirteen more to go!"

"Fuckin' aye!" Drew yelled back absently, thinking about his lips. The tingle was now a slight burning sensation. It was probably just the dope. Sometimes Boonie did dumb shit to get high, like cop some lame weed and lace it with crack or dust or whatever he had lying around. It made you, like, ultra-aware of your senses. Like the rain, trickling ice water down his spine. Like the howl of the wind through the trees, or the throb in his brain from sucking up all those fumes...

"Ech," he spat. His lips were really burning now; and worse, he could taste it: a bitter, pungent, distinctly chemical flavor. It stuck pins in the tip of his tongue and tickled at the roof of his mouth.

It was starting to make him nervous.

"Hey, Spacely Sprocket!" Boonie yelled. "You gonna give me a hand with this?" Drew turned to look at him, the barrel he was angling onto its side.

"Boonie." The word tasted vile in his mouth, down his throat. And his eyes were beginning to itch.

"What?" Impatient.

"Dude, I don't feel so good." He rubbed at his eyes, and the burn redoubled. "*Ouch!* Sono'abitich!" Now his nostrils were burning, and the smell was getting stronger. "There's something wrong here, man..."

"Don't get paranoid on me, Drew. I thought we were havin' fun."

"Yeah, but..."

A thunderclap ignited in fiery gray light, directly above their heads. Drew's bones nearly flew out through his skin; he could feel his nerves jangle and his heartbeat rev. "Christ!!" he yelled, feeling suddenly lightheaded.

The thunderclap faded.

But the gray light remained...

...and that was when they heard the sound: a crackling like ravenous flame, huge as it welled up to bury the silence. The world's largest wad of cellophane, crinkling slowly in the hand of an angry god. Black static, edging in from another dimension.

Coming up from the water below.

Drew turned to look at Boonie. Boonie's answering stare was uncharacteristically blank. *What the fuck...?* Drew watched him mouth, but the sound refused to carry. The barrel slipped out of his grasp and thundered to the truck bed on its side. Drew winced, felt it rather than heard it.

And still the roaring drone persisted, maddening: more liquid than static, the longer he listened. He turned toward it, staggering for the gate: head muzzy, body voltaged numb. The roach dropped unnoticed from between his thrumming fingers.

As Drew stared out over the edge.

At the terrible source of the sound.

The fish were trying to get out of the water. There was

no other way to describe it. They were literally *throwing themselves into the air*: leaping up and flailing in desperate but fleeting defiance of gravity. As if they were trying to spontaneously evolve, evolve into birds who could fly off to heaven, evolve into anything that could possibly escape and

No where.

No way.

He watched in horror as the water beneath them began to bubble, roll and churn. Then the gray light flickered, faded to black.

Behind him, Boonie let out a scream.

Drew turned just in time to see the drum rumbling toward him, picking up speed as it closed on the edge. It was the one that had slipped from his cousin's grip, but it wasn't the only one moving.

The whole back of the truck was a flurry of jittery motion, the last dozen barrels rocking and shuddering on their bases. As if something had come alive inside of them.

As if that something wanted out.

Drew barely managed to sidestep the drum as it thundered past him, disappeared over the side. There was one long, astonishingly pregnant moment of roaring silence.

Then the drum broke the surface, like egg-drilling sperm.

And thus was the new world conceived.



THE BRIDGE

*born of poison
raised in poison
claiming poison for its own
it rose:
a miracle of raw creation,
a hot black howl of life and death
intertwined and converted to
some third new option
agony blip with an echoing tail
so long it seemed to have gone on forever
only now the tail was wagging the dog
dredging up silt and sewage
bursting metal eggshell skins in a
riotous shrapnel dance of
power surging self-aware
gathering mass assassinating shape
infesting polluting corrupting
in hideous birthday celebration
it rose
already killing
and stared into the face of its maker*

Drew was less than six feet away when the massive liquid blowback erupted: a solid pillar of displaced fluid that shot from the creek to the peak of Black Bridge in a fraction of a second. It towered above him and stayed there, impossible: fracturing physics, disemboweling logic.

Coalescing into form.

The creature loomed, not freeze-framed or static but swaying like a wind-funnel, an enormous oily serpent. Against the black sky, it did not look real; but he could feel the incredible life-shredding charge of its presence, pulsating in the air. It made every hair on his body stand on end in total, mortal terror.

And then the lightning struck, releasing him utterly from his sanity. In the light, he could see all too clearly the things that suffered and swirled within it. Could see the rusted struts and rotted shells of the barrels: skeletal, clawing. Could see the multi-colored rorschach toxins that were its blood and soul.

Could see the hundreds and hundreds of tiny fish: not dead, no longer alive.

All of them, staring. At him.

With new eyes...

Then the lightning decayed; and before he could scream, the black wall descended upon him.

Boonie dove off the side of the truck in the second before it hit. He was still in the air when several tons went *WHOOOM* and splattered across its bed. He couldn't see what happened to Drew. He didn't need to see to know there was nothing he could do.

Boonie was heavy, and plummeted fast. He hadn't had time to plot a course. The railroad tracks came up to meet him, head-on and far too quickly.

He got his arms up and tucked his body enough to keep his neck from snapping; all it cost him was a chip from his shoulder and, on the second bounce, some teeth and lip, the two merged together in a wet hard boneshard buckshot hail that gagged him as he rolled, came up, instinctively assessed the situation.

No motion from the truck, except for the steam curling off the exterior. The door was still open; the cab was still vacant; the headlights still glared. Beyond the truck lay Toad Road and escape; the other way just led deeper into the Black Bridge woods. He could drive one whole hell of a lot faster than he could run.

That pretty much wrapped it up. Boonie vaulted for the cab, keeping one eye on the railroad ties and the other one peeled for forty-foot monsters. There was a harsh static crackle in the air that kept getting louder, the closer he got. It wasn't the sound from the creek, so it didn't mean shit.

It was the radio, he found out when he hit the driver's seat. Starview 92 had disintegrated into ear-splitting hiss. Bad sign. He grabbed the stick and jammed it in gear. Nothing happened. He laid on the gas and got dick.

"GOD DAMN IT!" he bellowed, grabbing the keys and grinding the ignition. "GO..."

That was when he noticed the rivulets, moving across the windshield. Not down. Across: a lateral, spider-webbing motion, like a hundred liquid tentacles gripping the cab. He stared in slack-jawed dumbstruck awe as the glass started to steam. The liquid compressed impossibly against the pane and squeezed.

Boonie dove for the passenger side, grappling with the handle. All around him, the safety glass starred. He cracked the door open, started to bail...

...as windows blew inward: a blinding razored spray...

...and then he was out the door and running, running for his life, a thousand tiny septic barbs of shrapnel lodged in his face, his hands, his neck and back and legs that tripped on a tie and brought him down, all two hundred and forty-seven pounds of him, shrieking pain as his scar-pitted Frankenstein's former right knee smacked cold steel rail...

...but he couldn't stay down or the game was fucking over, so he pistoned back up to his feet and hobbled with all his might, ignoring the pain, ignoring the everywhere tingle that turned to burn, terrible burn in his eyes, left eye stinging sharp and wet and bleeding, bleeding from within...

...and still he ran, trading the rails for Toad Road mud, screaming out prayers to baby Jesus as he stumbled through puddles of primal rain. Running from the devil in his own back pocket.

Running til he dropped...

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

by R.S. Hadji

Some sevenscore years ago, in the bright morning of the Machine Age, Ralph Waldo Emerson witnessed the Peaceable Kingdom fall before Mammon's steely jaws with these rueful words:

"Things are in the saddle, and ride mankind."

So they do, and so do we, in the twilight of the millennium, find ourselves greed-ridden, glitz-ridden and waste-ridden to the eyeballs. *Yet we fail to see.* Not so Skipp and Spector, Bad Boys of the New Horror now come to maturity, their vision clear and uncompromising in THE BRIDGE, a dirge to eco-death that delivers a wake-up call to the sleepwalkers. *Pay attention.* Or die.

Rockin' hard and talkin' hard, they avoid the usual clichés associated with disaster fiction, to introduce a uniquely dangerous serpent into Paradise. Pennsylvania, that is, a nice place to live and work, just downstream from Black Bridge, "a sin-eater for the Industrial Revolution...a toxic ground zero, an industrial instant primordial stew." (pg. 8)

Womb of a new life force, here referred to as Overmind, the child come to devour its parents:

"born of poison
raised in poison
claiming all form as its own...
awakening its seed in everything it touched."
(pg. 172)

THE BRIDGE spans the passing of a single day, the last, in which a world of comforts becomes a world of pain. "And not one of them ever even saw it coming." (pg. 21)

Overmind is born of anger, too, the passionate outrage of its authors pulsing through and between the lines. Witness this scathing indictment of our society:

"...the greedy insatiable eating machine. Shovelling resources in the one end. Shitting poison out the other...a parade of corporate criminals burrowing through civilization like flies in offal. Raping their heritage. Devouring their



Stephen Bennett

View From

young. Breeding swarms of dull-eyed mall dwellers..." (pg. 166)

THE BRIDGE is as much a 90's satire on the conspicuous consumption of the 80's as AMERICAN PSYCHO, albeit with more cheek than chic. But it, too, is swarming with *stuff*, the artifacts and detritus emblematic of the blandness and blindness of contemporary culture, soon to awaken to the touch of the Toxic God:

"...skittering little forms in concrete and plaster and wood. a frenzied soon of warped animate copulating kiich. It was a lawn ornament orgy by Bosch; leprechauns in motion. mounting fleeced. bleating plywood lambs. Jockeys splashing through the mud. riding pink flamingoes from behind." (pg. 260)

Overmind is the ultimate consumer, the perfect end product of consumerism. Pure appetite, consuming the consumers and consuming their desires in the ascendancy of trash. The great chain of being is broken, animal/ vegetable/ mineral all emancipated, all contaminated, all ambient and sentient. Hunting humans in "the Hell that Mankind had created on Earth." (pg. 235) So like life, and anti-life, THE BRIDGE is sprawling, messy, humongous, and volatile. It embraces, but barely contains, a knowing absurdity appropriate to the scenario, often erupting in bitter ironies. As when Deitz, the former HazMat worker turned toxic avenger seeks out "local heads of industry" -- and mounts these on the bristling spines of his trucks.

The humor here is *hard*, Swiftian in its savagery, finding its voice in the manic laughter of the Overmind-spawn. They giggle and grin like characters out of *The Vault of Horror*, or TWO THOUSAND MANIACS. For those washed in the Blood of the New Earth have seen and tasted the joke, know that the fun is infectious:

"...it wasn't until the tumors *stared back* that the full humor of his situation struck him." (pg. 208)

The manic energies loosed surge over the reader, a *rush* to Judgment inducing guilty exhilaration. In truth, the authors themselves are, at times, bedazzled by their own Bonfire of the Vanities. But this isn't just nihilist graffiti, and the agenda is not "Fuck everyone and everything" (pg. 341). They have a message to deliver and it *rides* the storm.

At a fundamental level, THE

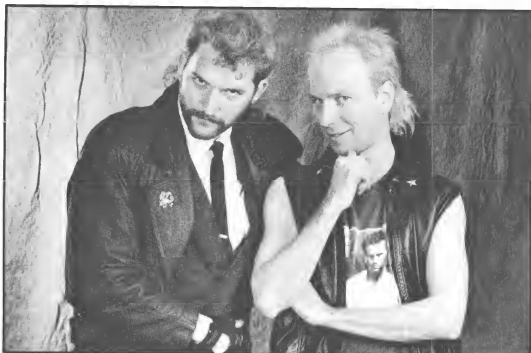
BRIDGE is designed as *agitprop*, to alarm and arouse readers to the environmentally toxic excretions of the past, and present, now lowering dangerously over our future. Skipp and Spector are employing the very potential of the medium to disturb, to open its readers, in order to run their message through the breach. The former has stated that:

"The idea is to ground the paranormal, to give it credibility, to make it organic and upsetting. We're trying to cut through the somnambulism." (*Midnight Graffiti*, June '88)

Seventeen pages of appendices on environmental action testifies to a sincerity of purpose. But the dilemma is this: good fiction can lie the truth, but can it empower people to do good? These men clearly respect the power of the word, and are willing to do what *they* can, with what they know. To sound a tocsin in the twilight, for all who care to listen.

Sound and fury are wedded in Skipp and Spector's work, and THE BRIDGE presents their most remarkable progeny to date. This novel is a mixed media presentation, its text an amalgam of prose and poetry in a 'mind movie' accompanied by an interactive soundtrack on CD and tape. The prose runs the scale of tonal shifts, harsh and raucous to capture the tang of catastrophe, sombre and lyrical to explore the ache of intimate tragedies left in its wake. Blank verse gives Overmind a distinctive voice, its recurrent refrain answered in spawn-song: the song of Reactor One, the song of the awakened reservoir, of the mutated Parade, "snake-faced or insect-headed, flippers and flailing...cavorting with the storm-song." (pg. 344) Hymns to the New Creation. The actual music of the soundtrack compliments the text: rockabilly for the white-trash Pushers, keening laments for loss of life and loved ones, and underlying each, the clicking clanging slithering chorus of Overmind, rising to a roar. "The sound of the death of the world." (pg. 365)

While the authors have little truck with ideolo-



Beth Gwinn

gies or "isms", they do respect the potency of myth and symbol, and these constitute an active presence in the images and incidents of THE BRIDGE. Overmind's ascendancy challenges, and subverts, the new faiths of science and 'magic', the mechanisms of the former failing utterly in the suspension of natural laws, the sacred circle of the latter providing but a brief and fragile shelter from the storm. The white witch Micki discovers too late that "you can't run from the devil in your own back pocket"; the toxicity that is our birthright. The "pillar of fire" that marks Overmind's godhead clearly recalls those Biblical cities of the plain, already corrupted. God's grace, and wrath, were long absent from Paradise before its Fall. Yet that terrible reckoning is received as "an altogether religious experience." (pg. 335) A mystery, as is transubstantiation, significantly bridging the gulf between life and death. And death-in-life:

"Overmind performed the miraculous rites of transubstantiation... *Take this and eat, for this is my body.* Making a new covenant. For the new world." (pg. 301)

Thus the figure-8, symbol of eternity, is Overmind's signature, the taint of its toxicity on all creation. Condemned to reforge the great chain of being, to know the Fall. No freedom

from the responsibility of godhead.

What can prevail, when all form is inverted, perverted? We are so small, we break so easily...

"Horror was love, in this Brave New Hell: the capacity for caring, and for sharing pain. To find oneself both in love and in Hell was more than torture, worse than madness. It was tantamount to sin." (pg. 325)

Nonetheless Deitz, the Toxic Avenger, endures and retains his humanity by asserting free will. He is Overmind's "fallen angel", seeking his love and absorbing her fragments in an act of hideous beauty. Transubstantiation. An act of faith. As THE BRIDGE is an act of faith on the part of its authors, a parable nestled in a paradox. Bearing its sting in the tail, like a wasp. A lesson to be learned while choices remain. But if this goes on...

"If there is any hope for the future, it must surely rest upon the ability to stare unflinchingly into the heart of darkness.

Then set our sights on a better place.

And prepare ourselves.

To go too far."

BOOK OF THE DEAD (pg. 14)

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The Philadelphia Childrens Orchestra circa 1975. (Left to Right) Dave Leonard, Mark Dauberman, John Skipp, Craig Spector, Lou Woodyman, Roy Smith.

Not Burning Bridges

Skipp & Spector on fate, music,
friendship, the best laid plans, and
the soundtrack to *THE BRIDGE*

by Zack Venable

When John Skipp and Craig Spector sat down to produce their own soundtrack for their novel, *THE BRIDGE*, it was more than just a vanity project. It was a seventeen-year old joint musical ambition, at long last realized: an ambition spanning the length of their complex-yet-durable friendship.

Skipp and Spector first met in 1974: a pair of fresh public high school dropouts, way tired of taking shit by the ages of sixteen and fifteen respectively, teetering on the brink of lonesome psychosis or full-tilt juvenile delinquency. Had there not been a smoking lounge at York Country Day School, they say, "God only knows where we might have wound up."

They sure as hell hadn't wanted to wind up on York, Pennsylvania. Compared to Arlington, Virginia (in John's case) and Virginia Beach (in Craig's), the place was hurtin': there was nothing to do, no one to do it *with*, and scarcely a soul who seemed to recognize that this was even a problem.

"On top of that," says Skipp, "the doddering, petty, power-mad, lard-assed feebs that posed as our authority figures had a fairly major problem with the length of our hair. Not to mention our take on authority figures. 'That long hair could still be an issue in '74 seemed, to them, 'an idiocy of neanderthal proportions'". When they finally got fed up with spending half their lives in the principal's office, they called it quits. From their respective schools. In the very same week. Without ever having met.

Their parents, of course, were less than thrilled. And in an eerie display of fate, both sets of grownups simultaneously sought refuge in a tiny private school called Country Day. Which was, at the time, an escape hatch for families with kids who were: A) rich; B) socially maladjusted; or C) all of the above.

"Our parents were attracted to the quality education, intimate classes, and one-on-one attention," says Spec-

tor. "We on the other hand, were mostly interested in the smoking lounge." And though they were only Class B kids, their parents managed to position them for entry. They could get in, if they so desired.

King Crimson's *Lark's Tongues in Aspic* was on the turntable when Skipp first checked out the lounge. A grinning long-haired guy in a tattered jeans jacket sat doodling in a notebook, while the cutest girl in school stared down over his shoulder, laughing hysterically. Skipp stepped closer, pulling a Tareyton 100 from his jacket pocket and, for the first time, lighting up in school without fear of retribution. It was, all in all, a heady sensation.

The long-haired guy was drawing a ridiculous Flakey Foont-like character. Skipp drew closer, experienced a jolt of recognition. "Robert Crumb!" he exclaimed.

Craig looked up and said, "Yeah!"

For his part, Craig found

Burning Bridges



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himself staring at the weirdest person he'd ever seen in his life. Skipp had finally succumbed to the pressure -- his shoulder-length hair was all but gone -- but he compensated by wearing a black country preacher's suit, complete with a string bowtie and an enormous top hat. Weird as he was, Craig also realized that "this was the only guy I'd ever met who looked like he actually *understood*".

From that moment on, they were inseparable. They hung out constantly. They started to jam at parties, in Craig's room, in the high school parking lot. Craig already played a pretty good remedial white-boy blues harp, and Skipp had taught himself basic guitar and bass. A handful of lessons from Skipp and six months down the road, Craig was holding his own on rhythm guitar and advancing, says Skipp, "more rapidly than any human has a right to." Skipp's solos advanced concomitantly, as Craig's rhythmic structures became more de-

manding.

And all the while, they were writing: weird cartoons, comics, poems, and stories. But mostly songs; music was definitely the medium. They had more than a hundred tunes between them by the time they hooked up with a fifteen-year old musical prodigy by the name of Roy Smith, and the spookily-gifted drummer/percussionist Mark Dauberman.

They dubbed themselves The Philadelphia Children's Orchestra in order to make it easier for them to rent orchestra bells and tympani for Mark (which they'd *never* hand over to a teenage rock band). They determined very quickly that they would be huge. In short order, PCO added a second percussionist, a huge sound system (run by long time friend Dino Rumble), and the biggest synthesizer bank in all of York (nine keyboards in all) to its arsenal. Dave Leonard, the synthesist, was also a pho-

tographer, so they started doing multimedia presentations with slide projectors and dissolve units which melded images on the gigantic screen behind them.

They were big, loud, and weird: Front-man Skipp wore a trench coat and black negligee as the mad scientist in "Make You An Android", trying to talk his maid into letting him remove her internal organs, load her up with solid-state components, and turn her into his eternal love-slave. Craig experimented with slo-mo animation, demonstrating the pressures of modern life by drawing a guy getting his head squeezed by enormous vice grips during the intro to their thirty-minute opus, "Suburbia". They did ludicrous skits featuring resurrection by voodoo, terrorist elves hijacking concerts to bankroll Santa's operation, explosions loud enough to shake plaster off the walls, a mascot called "Pants-Off Mahoney", and Champion embalming fluid.

It was an exciting time. The onstage weirdness was reminiscent of The Tubes, without a fraction of the budget or, ultimately, success (unfortunately, York was not L.A.). Drawing on elements of Crimson, Hendrix, Zappa, Tull, Rundgren, Yes, Zeppelin, Floyd and ELP (not to mention The Beatles, Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath and Return To Forever), PCO forged a unique progressive musical sound that was utterly destined for failure. "But damn," they say, "it was fun to do."

When the band broke up in '77 -- a slow, painful death of attrition -- it was time to reevaluate everything. And the clock was ticking. Craig promptly enrolled in the Atlanta College of Art, where they proceeded to beat all the fun out of his cartooning style; a trauma from which he has only recently begun to recover. Returning to PA, he recorded a quick solo demo with the PCO rhythm section, particularly bassist/guitarist/keyboardsmith Smith, who -- upon graduating from high school -- began building his own studio, Turtle Beach Recordings. Spector then headed for New York, hustling the tape to every producer who would listen, including Mark "Moogy" Klingman, fresh off of working with Todd Rundgren's Utopia.

"Actually, I got in a lot of

doors," he recalls. "I guess they saw something faintly charming in my determined naïvete. Most of them were really nice. They sat down, they talked, and they actually listened.

"But in the end, they'd inevitably wind up saying, 'Well I've never heard anything like *this* before.' Then they'd wish me a lotta luck, and that would be the end of that."

John too, tried to put together new bands, with mucho ambition and zero success. He followed Craig to Atlanta, staying just long enough to suffer a complete emotional collapse. PCO's demise had hammered him more than he knew. He had hung all his hopes for the future on the band. When things didn't pan out, reality began to crumble. In his head, the personal ran to the universal very quickly. Everywhere he looked, he saw the global End Times looming. The accompanying depression left him feeling paralyzed, despairing, enraged, and more than a little bit crazy.

"I just thank God," he says now, "that I didn't find Jesus or fall into the clutches of the Mental Health machinery. Those are the sad, pathetic, ridiculous fates that are usually reserved for people who crack as badly as I did."

Within two months, he returned to York, got a job at a gas station, and slowly began to rebuild his life. He also read voraciously -- Alan Watts, John Brunner, Harlan Ellison, John Gardner, Robert Anton Wilson -- and for the first time, began to seriously write fiction as an attempt to make sense of the changes going on, both in his head and in the world at large.

It was right around then that both Skipp and Spector discovered the New Age, which at that point -- before Shirley MacLaine made it mainstream -- seemed to them a pretty radical grass-roots phenomenon. It was the reformed backwash of '60's idealism: now, suddenly, it was time to rebuild the world in the image of all that they'd learned.

Skipp's next stop was Robert Schwartz's New Age School for Entrepreneurs in Tarrytown, New York. His ambitions, at this point, included building a multi-media corporation devoted to "getting the word out," in all of its forms. The School (actually a series of weekend seminars) helped him realize

that such mega-conglomerates were born one step -- make that *project* -- at a time.

When a couple of investors from the School became interested in producing a *musical* project with him, Skipp immediately contacted Spector, who had finally dropped out of art school in disgust and returned to York. Both of them, over the years, had continued to write music of increasing depth, complexity, and ambition. With the possibility of real money involved, they were able to pull together a ragtag band of locals and whip up a handful of tunes.

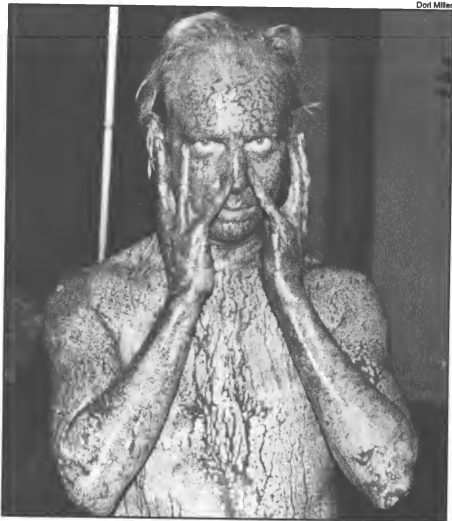
But they hadn't played together in years, and it showed. When the investors balked, saying they just weren't ready, Craig said, "Fuck this," and wrangled his way into the Berklee College of Music. He was determined to *get* ready, so that next time they had a real shot they wouldn't blow it.

Spector moved to Boston and threw himself into music school, completing the four year program in three, working two jobs on the side,

doing everything from washing dishes to working in warehouses to canvassing for Greenpeace. "Berklee was like musical boot camp for me," he says. "They basically broke my hands and said, 'No, *this* is how you play the guitar'. I had to rebuild my technique from scratch.

Craig also studied composition and theory, and parlayed this newfound discipline into the founding of Private Sector, a Boston band made up of the cream of Berklee's student players (including jazz saxophonist Walter Beasley). The band played nothing but Spector originals, which now leaned in the jazz/pop/fusion direction. It was his first experience with running the show. "I put together the charts, ran the rehearsals, booked the gigs and studio time," he says. He also drew the ads, kept the schedule straight, made sure that everyone got there on time and in tune. "It was my baby, and my responsibility to see to it that the thing flew," he adds. "And I took it very seriously."

Dori Miller



Burning Bridges

In addition, Craig was inspired by the street musicians of Boston, their incredible self-sufficiency. He assembled a modular solo system that allowed him to play on the street or in clubs, both of which he did, at every available opportunity. It got him exposure, kept him focused, and brought in extra bucks; when he went down to York to visit Skipp, he always booked himself a gig or two to subsidize the trip.

Meanwhile, Skipp pursued his end of the agenda by recording a pair of independent records on his own cryptically-entitled UMI Records label. They were recorded at Roy Smith's expanded 8-track Turtle Beach studio, with Mark Dauberman on drums. Craig, in his spare time, designed the logo. After *It's Time* -- an album of angry, largely acoustic arrangements -- came an even angrier anti-war/anti-nuke EP. The anti-nuke side was titled "Three Mile Island", in sup-

busted for nothing or sit back and watch a nightmare process that was utterly out of our hands. Some choice. We dispersed.

"And when a sixteen-year old kid that we'd brought down with us decided that he needed to get back to his family, I drove him back to York in the middle of the night. It was like driving into the mouth of Hell. I could virtually feel the radiation gathering murderous mass in the air, dooming me and literally everyone I knew. My family had been unwilling to evacuate, the girl I was in love with was unwilling to evacuate, no matter how hard I pleaded. There was no fucking use.

"Craig and I drove around and around the following day. It was like driving through a ghost town. Everyone had either gotten the hell out or locked themselves inside their houses, praying to God that the authorities weren't really

thriller that was the apex of his writing to date (not to mention Billy Rowe's rock opera in *THE CLEANUP*). But though he'd sold a couple of stories to *Twilight Zone Magazine*, he was unable to get a bite with *THE REAL WAR*, and the project was left to die.

Then one night, Craig called him from Boston with this idea about a punked-out vampire in the subways.

* * *

Ten years after they first met, they walked into Bantam Books with *THE LIGHT AT THE END* and a five-year plan. It was a chart hastily sketched out on graph paper the morning of the actual meeting. Spector says, "That's what happens when, after years of plugging away in thankless anonymity

ODAK 5053 TMY

33



32A

33

KODAK 5053 TMY

34



33A

34

KODAK 5053 TMY

35



34A

35
Stephen Bennett

port of the March 28th Coalition, which was throwing a rally in Harrisburg to protest the reopening of the plant.

"When the accident went down, on March 28, 1979," Skipp recalls, "we were both living in York, less than twelve miles, as the crow flies, from TMI. Craig and I promptly attempted to organize a combination exodus from York and protest on the Washington Monument grounds; running ads in the papers, handing out fliers. A grand total of fifteen of us met out back of the York Mall and started the doleful caravan down.

"When we landed in D.C., waving our signs, the cops immediately ordered us to disperse. There was no media presence whatsoever. We quickly realized that our choices were to get

lying. They *were* of course, though exactly how *much* remains to be established.

"But one thing's for certain. We will never forget that feeling of powerlessness. It was the worse feeling in the world. And, looking back, there's no way of overestimating how much that experience contributed in our writing of *THE BRIDGE*."

John's next band, Arcade, was put together in support of the records, but it wasn't too long before he finally acknowledged that it was time to leave York. In August of '81, he and singer Kim Eberly moved up to New York City with a handful of bohemian friends. With Eberly, he developed a soundtrack demo for *THE REAL WAR*, the New Age/WorldChange suspense

ity, you're suddenly whacked by the overnight success stick. No matter how long you've prepared for it, it still kinda sneaks up on ya."

The little blue lines on the chart indicated their next four books: *THE CLEANUP*, *THE SCREAM*, a short story collection that later mutated into *DEADLINES*, and *THE BRIDGE*. They figured on doing roughly a book a year. The little red lines on the chart were for the soundtracks they'd be writing and recording for each and every novel. One a year, as well. They no longer remember what color the lines were that denoted all those *movies* they'd be making each year. "Bottom line," says Skipp "we were still young and stupid. But you can't say we weren't ambitious." So while Skipp started growing a family,

Craig started growing a recording studio. "While the focus, by necessity, had to shift to the books," he says, "it was my job to keep the music alive." The first project was thirty minutes of soundtrack material for *LIGHT*, recorded within four months of selling the book. It featured (among other things) Spector sneaking down into the subway tunnels of New York City with his little Foxtek Porta-Studio, getting real train and commuter noise, then reversing, mutating, and otherwise filtering those sounds into the music.

The net result was pretty cool: a couple of tunes, a haunting main instrumental piece or two, and a handful of unsettling ambient set-pieces. But nobody -- including Bantam, Skipp and Spector -- knew how to market it. As far as they knew, it had never been done before.

"On top of that," Skipp

that they were ready.

* * *

It began with an invitation from Tom Savini to appear as zombies in his remake of *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*. Coming off the intensive three months that it took to write the first draft of *THE BRIDGE*, they were more than happy to spend two weeks shambling around as dead guys. "Once again," Spector says, "it was method acting."

"Not to mention a dream come true," adds Skipp.

But when they heard that the soundtrack gig for *NIGHT* was still open, a "little light bulb went off over our heads." They went back to York and, in less than five days, recorded twenty-five minutes of the weirdest, most original music they had ever done. Ex-PCO drummer Mark Dauberman came

around by roughly two hundred people asking me how they could get their copies. So I figured, either we slapped this thing into production, or I was gonna spend the rest of my life chained to a dubbing deck. You know, 'And this one's for Bobby in Witchita...' Click."

The only question was: how to market the thing? "FAILED MUSIC FOR THE REMAKE OF THE CLASSIC ZOMBIE FILM?"

And then -- like a ten-ton weight in a Monty Python sketch -- it hit them.

"We hadn't even *thought* about doing a soundtrack for *THE BRIDGE*," Skipp recalls with amazement. "I dunno...it didn't have any musicians as characters, we weren't yet trying to develop it for film, and it had just taken too much out of us to *write* the damn thing. But a couple of the pieces -- Craig's *'Overmind'* and *'Cutting New*

AK 5053 TMY

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KODAK 5053 TMY

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KODAK 5053 TMY

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KC



▷ 2A

3



▷ 3A

4



▷ 4A

5

Stephen Bennett

says, "things came up that we would have never expected: babies, marriage, divorce, *NIGHTMARE 5*, the *BOOK OF THE DEAD* twins, and the simple difficulty of consistently writing novels that were any goddamn good. This in addition to the fact that everything -- but *everything* -- takes longer than you think."

This, however, was never a reason to stop. So they spent the next several years developing demos for every book they wrote. With every new title, Spector's studio grew, and so did his ability to run with the technology. This greatly enhanced their capacity to get what they wanted without renting time from the pros.

Then came *THE BRIDGE*. It was the turning point.

And, this time, they believed

in at this stage, laying down live and programmed percussion for the tracks that later developed into *"The Bridge and the Storm"*, *"Love and Pain"*, *"Mutant Death Storm"*, *"When the Rain Comes"*, and *"Attack of the Cheesy Killer Lawn Ornaments."*

There were forty acts under consideration for the soundtrack, including Simon Boswell and Skinny Puppy. When the gig went to a Pittsburgh composer who had worked with the producers before, John and Craig were left, once again, "sitting like morons on the best music of our lives."

But the clincher was a horror music panel they crashed early this March at the first World Horror Convention in Nashville. "After we played the music," Spector says, "I was followed

Teeth," for example -- were utterly mutational from the gig. Once we realized the answer was right under our noses the whole time, everything clicked into place."

They sprang back into action with Craig at the wheel. In addition to his recording, mixing, composing, arranging and performing chores, he also seized the production reins; namely, working out the logistics of CD and cassette manufacture, setting up financing, and coordinating the remaining sessions. The novel was slated for an October release. Another novel was already in progress. Much remained to be done. The soundtrack had to be done cheap. And it had to be done *now*.

"A big reason why this project was able to take off," says Spec-

Burning Bridges

tor, "was the advent of high-quality home recording gear, digital audio tape, and affordable CD production. We found ourselves mutating into a computer-age cottage industry."

Scott Wolfman, of Wolfman Productions, had booked the Splatpack college lectures in the past. Craig says that he and Wolfman then "brainstormed the wonders of direct mail marketing, ran some theoretical numbers past each other, and realized that this thing was do-able. It could fly." Banking on S&S's reputation and in-house production capabilities, coupled with Wolfman's marketing expertise, they evolved a strategy that combined direct mail with sales through personal appearances, convention dealers and specialty shops in LA and New York.

Unfortunately, just as the project was getting off to a good start, Spector's marriage was coming to a end; which meant he had to relocate his studio -- "Not to mention my entire life," he says, ruefully -- back to New York, where old friends Matt and Allison Jorgensen allowed him to invade their upstairs loftspace: This space, dubbed The Belfry, doubled as Craig's bedroom and recording space for the following months ("Not that I was *getting* any sleep," he hastens to add).

Their next move was to hook-up with Brian Emrich, a crazy bassist/programmer/sample-head with severe industrial sensibilities. They'd met him years earlier, at New York's Forbidden Planet. Now he worked with

TVT Records and sold weird books at conventions on the side. Brian was ready, willing, and able; he promptly mid-died up with Craig in the Belfry, recording the whole thing through Craig's Tascam 688 Eight-track-onto-cassette Midistudio.

Meanwhile, Skipp re-conceptualized the soundtrack itself, renaming the existing pieces, reorganizing them into a structure that matched the arc of the story, and writing new pieces to plug the narrative holes. He also rifled Brian's files of animal and natural noises for weird sounds to sample and mutate.

When the Jorgensens wisely opted to vacation in Arizona, Skipp, Spector and Emrich took over the house for three weeks that eventually swallowed the entire summer. Craig and Brian constructed all the remaining rhythm tracks and the three of them collaborated on the rest of the elaborate sonic environment. At the last minute, singer Kim Eberly was brought in to add hot female vocals to Spector's "Changing World" and Skipp's "Missing You". New friends Dewey Collins and Ron Morton added last-minute sequences to "Burning Bridges" and "No Future" respectively (the latter also featuring Emrich on lead vocals).

The basic tracks were recorded on the 688 and then dumped onto Roy Smith's Tascam 16-track for vocals and mixdown. The finished tape was mixed onto digital audio tape (DAT). Over the years, Smith and longtime friend

Bob Hoke had formed Turtle Beach Systems, one of the pioneers in IBM computer-controlled music-editing software and hardware. Once on DAT, it was dumped onto the Turtle Beach 56k Recording System, which allowed CD quality recording on computer hard disc. The soundtrack was then edited on computer and transferred back to DAT.

From there, it went to American Helix, a small company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, specializing in high quality compact disc and cassette reproductions. Which left Spector to nurse the project through the final stages of post-production -- layout, endless haggling, etc. -- while Skipp moved his family to California for what he coyly calls "the next stage of the multi-media empire-building game."

Which leaves Skipp and Spector now awaiting the release of the music, and the response to THE BRIDGE. This is, understandably, a very intense time. "Someday," Craig says, grinning edgily through his exhaustion, "we'll be able to look back at this and laugh." But there's a completion implicit in all of this, and both of them know it. It's the opportunity to walk forward across all of their unburned bridges, fulfill the dreams of their rebellious rock 'n' roll youth. It's a chance that few people ever get, and however it goes down, they maintain that it was worth the effort.

"The thing that really brought it full-circle for me," says Skipp, "was the day we laid down 'Big Dumb Bastard.'" (his ode to Boonie Pusser, the midnight dumper in the novel who starts the whole toxic ball rolling). "It was two days before Craig's birthday, so I went down to Manny's on 48th Street and bought him a blues harp that could wail in A and F sharp minor. 'Happy Birthday,' I said. 'You're on'."

"It was the first time he'd played in thirteen years," Skipp concludes. "And the first notes he blew are what you hear on the tape."

"I watched him wail, and I said to myself, 'We're back'."



Stephen Bennett

NO ~~FUTURE~~ FUTURE

I had a dream again last night
that everything turned out all right
The seeds of poison never grew
The world was safe for me and you
But by the bitter light of day
there's just corruption and decay

I think we're running out of time
fucked by greedhead corporate slime
All our hopes, our fears and dreams
are coming undone at the seams
No future on this road we take
No future in this world we make
No future
No future

Gonna take you by the hand
Walk across this wasted land
Singing in the acid rain
Bringing back a world of pain
No future there to fill your needs
No future in the age of greed

When they tell you it's okay
things will all work out someday
you'll know they're lying
through their teeth

in their dying disbelief
Nowhere to run no place to hide
No way to stop the toxic tide
No future
No future

Gaia lives, Gaia dies
No one hears when Gaia cries
Welcome to the gathering hive
No one here gets out alive
No future for the bleeding sons
No future for the twisted ones
No future on this road we take
No future, nothing left to save
The future's waiting in the grave

No future on the bottom line
Nowhere to hide
No future

words/ music by
Spector/Emrich/Morton

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ONE FILED

by Robert Devereaux

We admit it. There's a right way and a wrong way to bring one's loving lady into conformity with the image of womanly perfection that burns bright in every man's heart. Dad and me, we went about it the wrong way. That's clear to us now, after all the grief that came pelting down into our lives when half the Sacramento police force jackbooted their way through our front door and kept us from further satisfying our desires, modest as they were, on the naked limbs of our composite wife.

But it's our feeling that before the state--that vast motherless bastion of rectitude and righteous ness--unlocks our cell to dead-march us along its sexless corridor, then to mumble piety into us from the mercy-thin pages of its Holy Bible, cinch us down snug and secure, and hiss open its gas jets to pack us off to the next life, we owe it to the rest of you idolatrous cockwielders out there to pass on the lesson we learned. Does that sound agreeable to you, Dad? Dad, I'm talking to you! He says it does.

It began with a birth, nearly nineteen years ago, on the night of February 15th, 1972. My dear wife Rhonda was all of twenty-one then, amber of eye and huge of breast, vivacious, fun-loving, ever faithful to me in spite of my shortcomings and the handful of cunt-hungry mongrels that always seemed to be sniffing about her skirts. Lovely as life itself was Rhonda, and carrying our son.

My folks came down from Chico in mid-January to help with last-minute preparations; they were radiant with love for us both and just itching to be grandparents. Rhonda's mother, Wilma Flannery, flew in from Iowa to be with "her precious baby" in her finest hour. She was one eccentric biddy, my mother-in-law, old and wizened at fifty. Her husband had left her soon after Rhonda was born, never to be heard from again. That didn't surprise me and I don't think it

surprised Rhonda either. Although I wished Wilma had stayed in Oskaloosa, I did my level best to ignore her high-pitched demands and irritating ways and focus all my attention on Rhonda.

My wife's projected delivery date was Washington's Birthday, and around a quiet dinner one night at Mario's, my mom and especially my dad--Oh come off it, Dad, you know you did!--teased us about it, threatening to call their grandchild George or Georgina in honor of the man on the dollar.

Rhonda's mother sat hunched over her plate, wolfing down tortellini. Good food always seemed to shut dear old Wilma up for a while.

As it happened, the baby arrived ahead of schedule. On the afternoon of the 15th, Rhonda and the two older women, wanting some girl-time alone, talked me and Dad into a night on the town. Before they booted us out into the light drizzle that had begun to come down, I pinned a hastily scrawled itinerary on the kitchen corkboard, just in case: dinner and drinks at California Fats, then a late-night showing of *Psycho* at the Tower. Dad and I were fond of Hitchcock movies back then. And after the accident that brought us together, we loved them even more.

The call came halfway through dinner. We'd done more drinking than eating, a lot more. Three swallows of wine to every forkful of food, I'd guess. Ordinarily we'd have thought twice about taking to the highway with that much alcohol in our veins. But I was determined to be right there by Rhonda's side when my baby was born, and judging from Mom's babbling over the phone from the hospital, we had no time to waste thinking about what was safe and what wasn't. So we threw some bills on the table, staggered together to my VW van, ramped up onto Highway 50, and five minutes later --in a passing maneuver that would have meant certain death

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at high noon on a bone-dry road with a teetotaling priest behind the wheel—we rammed into the back end of a screeching Raley's truck and felt for one mercifully brief instant the twin agonies of metal-mangled flesh and bone from the front and the whomp and sizzle of a fireball engulfing us from the rear.

If the notations of the hospital staff present at my son's delivery were correct, our precise time of death was 7:41 p.m. There was tightness everywhere and a painful sliding and then suddenly the chill of freedom. We were somehow nakedly intertwined, my dad and I. When the shock of the cold was blanketed away and sweet warm milk filled our mouth and soothed our belly, we bleared open our eyes and were astounded to see a gigantic Rhonda-face beaming down at us. We tried to call out to her, but our mouth was full of nipple and our body throbbed and the blankets felt so warm and cozy around us that we soon drifted off. When we awoke, nothing but baby sounds came out of us, no matter how carefully we tried to speak. When Dad saw his wife Arlene (my mom) smiling down at us, I couldn't help but feel his sadness and his frustration, and we wailed with our whole being and fisted our tiny fists and did our best to squeeze every cubic inch of air out of our little lungs with each scream. But just when we thought merciful death might reclaim us, the air came rushing back in and the cruel joke continued.

It was touch and go for a while; learning to feel okay about jacking Jason off.

Our name was Jason. I'd picked it out myself, not because it was popular—the J-names were only starting to catch on back then—but from a love of Greek mythology. It hadn't been high on Rhonda's list, but she relented in exchange for my agreeing to the name Amy Lou if it was a daughter. Yes Dad I know, you've told me many times how glad you are we weren't born female.

The newspapers call us Jason Cooper, of course. But Dad and I kept up the use of our old names with each other while we endured the long frustration of babyhood, waiting for my son's body to develop the motor skills to support intelligible speech. For the record, my name is Richard and his is Clarence. The state can believe it's gassing somebody named Jason if it wants to, but I'm telling you there never was any such person, leastways not one with an identity separate and distinct from me and my father. We suspect most reincarnates, being singletons, forget who they were and simply fall for the new identity their mom and dad foist upon them. But we, as doubles, were able to keep Richard and Clarence alive inside the putative Jason we might otherwise have become.

After word of the accident reached them, Arlene stayed on longer than she'd planned with Rhonda. The two women comforted each other in mourning our deaths, but their joy in Jason's upbringing brought his mother and grandmother

even closer. Arlene eventually sold her home in Chico and moved in with Rachel. Wilma, on the other hand, was spooked by death. She gave her daughter a motherly thump on the brow, glared down at baby Jason, shuddered, crossed herself, and boarded the first plane back to the Midwest.

We're telling you all this because there's no way you can understand why we did what we did unless you know who we are and what it was like growing up this way. But for our own peace of mind, we'll spare you those details. Suffice it to say that we did not like being dictated to by the women we loved. By the time we were able to talk, we realized that no one was going to believe our story and that even if they did, some agency would take us away from Arlene and Rhonda for a lifetime of cold scrutiny. So we kept mum—and thereby kept Mom and Grandmom too, if you'll pardon our humor. Our greatest challenge was chasing away erectile manfiends, but a bit of strategic mayhem beyond our years and one or two well-calculated glances from hell kept the motherfucking to a minimum.

Our infancy and toddlerdom and childhood weren't the worst of it by any means. When puberty struck, we nearly went crazy. We'd both forgotten—given the sleep of the hairless genital in childhood—what it feels like when the hormones surge up for the first time, raging and roaring like typhoons through an adolescent body. And it was even worse for us because we understood from the outset what it all meant. As for girls our own age, our grown-up manner fascinated adults but kept our peers ever adversarial; besides which we neither of us felt much propensity toward pedophilia. So their chests filled out and their thighs went soft and curvy and they got that self-conscious wary look about their tender faces, but Dad and I paid them no mind. Understand our dilemma: The women we loved we'd already married. They lived right down the hall from us, growing no younger as the clock stole away moment after moment. And our enthusiastic young cock-sprouting thick curls of brown hair all around and popping up far fatter and longer, we were pleased to note, than either of us had been in our truck-crushed, fire-whomped bodies—took to them like a compass needle takes to magnetic north.

It was touch and go for a while, learning to feel okay about jacking Jason off. I'd hidden that sort of thing from Dad, and he never talked to me about the ins and outs of lovemaking and the rest of it except when I reached ten and he muttered something about "sex rearing its ugly head" and tossed some bland vaguely Presbyterian book of cautions and platitudes in my lap. And we were father and son after all, engaging in what felt, the first couple of times, uncomfortably like homosexuality. But we made the necessary adjustments in our thinking—one always does to get what one's body craves—and relaxed into it like the old hands we were.

But ever and always, Arlene and Rhonda moved through the house, and we had to be on our guard not to be caught leering at them and not to demonstrate anything more than filial and grandfilial affection. We buried ourselves in bookishness, skipping over the stuff we recalled from our previous schooling and delving into new areas of knowledge with a depth that astounded our teachers and made us the loathed bespectacled pariah of the class of '90. With our

stratospheric SAT scores and the enthusiastic support of the Hiram Johnson faculty, we wowed our way into Berkeley and began work toward a degree in 20th century history—we had, after all, lived through most of it, and current affairs had always been our strong suit.

It was in American History that we met Lorelei Meeks, she of the owl eyes and large glasses, breastless, thin as a rail, blank of face, and devoid of personality. Lorelei was a non-entity, a vacuum of need, a woman who faded into every background. Her body begged to be written upon and we, with our fat fountain-pen full of sperm, scribbled all over her. Whatever it struck our fancy to do with her she gave in to. Dad and I divvied up her holes. Every pinch of flesh was ours to caress and lubricate and shackle up and slap until it blushed or bruised or bled. And in the morning, after a shower, she'd be wiped clean again like a newly sponged chalkboard, empty as Orphan Annie's eyes and yearning to be used anew. Our grades suffered, for which we made Lorelei pay in welts and cigarette burns, and in enemies of ice-cold Coors.

At Thanksgiving we brought her home.

We thought we could divert our river of rage onto our wispy girlfriend. We thought that having a receptacle we could empty our lust into any time we liked would lessen our desire for our former spouses or at least allow us to keep it under control. But we were wrong, as wrong as a Biblethumper. We found out just how wrong when the front door swung open and our two beloved soul mates, all smiles, welcomed Jason and his

dear Lorelei into the home Rhonda and I had built in the spring of '71.

While we sat in the living room, going through the maddening ritual of "introducing the girlfriend to the family," all sorts of bells and whistles were going off inside our head. My dad stole glances at Arlene, her hair gone white now, dignified lines of age making more lovely the face he hadn't caressed as a lover for nearly twenty years. She seemed genuinely spritely in her deep blue dress and her pearls, and her short white hair hugged her head just so. But I was in agony over Rhonda, looking sexier than ever at forty, stylish in her washed-out jeans and bulky breast-defining sweater. Her hair tumbled long and blonde down her back, soft and springy and natural in a way that brought to mind her blonde pubic softness and the sweet pink labia so long denied me. Thank God they ignored Jason, choosing instead to pour their endearments into the smiling nullity that sat, legs crossed, nervously beside him on the couch.

But inside us, an idea was gathering bits of itself together. The location of rope and tools in the garage, of clean dust rags in the closet, of scissors and carving knives in the kitchen, suddenly took on grave importance. It was as if the house itself was shoving Dad and me into some inevitable sequence of bloody dancesteps.

We heard Jason's thin voice fielding inane questions. From the way they received his answers, it seemed that our facade of calm was somehow being maintained. And when we



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moved into the dining room, watching the maddening thighs of our proper wives sway this way and that, we heard Jason announce that he had a special surprise for his three most favorite women in the world. You'd think the odds against one man subduing three women would be pretty high. And in most cases you'd be right. But people become surprisingly compliant when they're in a festive mood and someone they trust—a son or grandson for example—sets down the rules of playful bondage they must submit to in order to receive an unexpected gift. In no time they were blindfolded with their hands tied tight behind them, a predicament our dear Lorelei was used to.

Not so Arlene and Rhonda. They complained, playfully at first, then more vociferously, about the chafing of the ropes. But their protests really began in earnest when we tied their ankles to the chair legs—right to right, left to left—and removed their shoes. People tend to be funny that way about their feet.

You can imagine the effect all this snipping away of blouses and bras and panties was having on us.

We let them sit there complaining into unresponsive air while we lowered the blinds and gathered tools. Some of the things our hands lifted off the garage pegboard or dug out of the drawers in the kitchen astonished us at the time, made us worry we'd gone off the deep end, though on hindsight they all made perfect sense. Once we had them laid out on the rug, our first order of business was the unclothing of our women. Because garments are not easily stripped from bound limbs, we used Rhonda's pinking shears for most of it. Arlene freaked when we scissored away her stockings, maybe from the feel of the cold metal moving up along her thighs. I can't be sure. Her shrieks spiked out into these absurd high-pitched bursts that sounded like a jackal in a trap. So hard were they on the ears that we decided to remove her blindfold and gag her with it. We did our best to ignore the look in her eyes; it was too painful to dwell on for any length of time. Dad was a little bit ashamed of her, weren't you Dad? I mean at that point we hadn't so much as broken skin, we hadn't even *hinted* that that's where things were headed, yet already Arlene was huffing and going all red in the face like McMurphy being electroshocked in *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Rhonda was a lot cooler about things, asking her son what he was doing, keeping her voice as calm and soothing as she could. When we felt like answering her, which was seldom, we kept our responses brief and noncommittal. We preferred letting our Fiskars do the talking for us. We liked their unrelenting ways, the steady rise and fall of the alligator mouth, the steel bite of perfectly zigzagged teeth, the falling away of fabric, and the slow, hypnotic unveiling of forbidden flesh. From the look of Rhonda's private parts, a bit puffy and vaguely gleaming, we half suspected our perversity was

turning her on.

You can imagine the effect all this snipping away of blouses and bras and panties was having on us. But mixed in with the arousal was a sadness, a bitter sorrow at the ravages of time on human flesh. Here, emerging one sharp snip at a time, were the beloved bodies of our dear wives, hidden away for nearly twenty years. Our idle fantasies at childhood's end, our torrid love affair with onanism in adolescence, our imagined substitutions of these two women when we squeezed shut our eyes and eased into Lorelei—all of that had been erected on memories two decades old. We were ill-prepared to witness the accumulated assaults of age on their flesh: the sag, the flab, the withdrawal of vibrancy and resilience and muscle tone.

We dimmed the lights.

When we finished denuding our women, we took Rhonda's suggestion and turned up the thermostat. I was able to convince Dad, despite his initial resistance, that we too ought to disrobe. His preference was to unzip, reach into our shorts, and bring out into the open Jason's erection only; but I argued that we were, after all, going to be doing more than simply fucking the odd vagina and that it would be far easier to shower blood off our skin than to remove it from our best suit, and he, inordinately fond of that suit (his taste, not mine), could only agree. So we removed Rhonda's and Lorelei's blindfolds, not wanting to limit our display to Arlene only, and slow-stripped for our three naked mates. It's fair to say we surprised ourselves—Wouldn't you agree, Dad?—with our prowess as ecdyasists. I sincerely believe we turned the ladies on, even Arlene gasping behind her gag; I can testify that we surely turned ourselves on.

Not to put too fine a point on it, we pleased them, our wives and the vapidity they flanked. If they played at resistance, which one or two of them did, we read their coyness as a come on, and came on. At one point, Rhonda, acting the castrating bitch, snapped at our penis, but we had matters well in hand and snatched it free of her cruel jaws, backhanding her for her naughtiness and clamping our own choppers on her left nipple until she screamed out an apology profuse enough to satisfy us. Even so, we steered clear of her mouth thereafter, though memories of my lusty young spouse feasting at my groin during our married life drew me back to her lips again and again, and Dad had to intervene several times for the sake of our manhood.

Finally, when we'd gotten as close to our women as we were going to get without breaking skin, Dad and I began our failed—albeit noble—experiment. Looking back, it astounds us that we never once questioned the fundamental wisdom of what we were doing. But in this short, sorry life, one moment often leads to the next without time to entertain consequences. There seemed an inevitability in operation at the time, a passionate surging forth which no attempt at mere reason stood a chance against. Maybe all of our synapses weren't firing properly that day, or maybe something inside of us snapped. Whatever the reason, we forged ahead.

From the way Arlene and Rhonda were behaving, it was clear they would never consent to the group marriage idea that had occurred to us first. The very gathering of the tools—the saws, the screwdrivers, the staple gun—was surely our sub-

liminal recognition that that scenario was not about to play itself out. To our unsettled minds, that left but one option: the scavenging of our wives' bodies and the bold reconstitution of what we liberated from those hallowed grounds into as near perfection as we could get on the blank canvas of Lorelei's body.

We began with the teeth. To our surprise, Lorelei resisted. But a small clamp at either corner of her jaws rendered her struggles pointless. Although our first extractions were bumbling and amateurish, before long we were uprooting her stubborn molars with all the élan of any D.D.S. out there. When only gums remained, we found some cotton balls in the medicine cabinet to plug our ears with. Lorelei's gurgled screams were no joy to listen to, and we suspected that Arlene and Rhonda, once we began on them, would be no less merciless in their protests.

I hated what came next. Each of us, as you might imagine, was partial to his own wife's dentition, so we decided, after heated debate, to alternate extractions, taking the odd-numbered teeth from Arlene and the evens from Rhonda. To keep them in their proper sequence, and to counter our worries that teeth, like seedlings, might require immediate transplant to remain viable, we followed each tooth's removal with its immediate insertion into Lorelei's gums, tapping them in as gently as possible so as not to injure their roots. What I hated about all of this were the heartrending screams of my wife and "mother. I wasn't prepared for the way their distant cries tore through my innards, making my brain beat with pain.

It grew worse when we began on the fingernails. Dad cursed me for a coward but I hung back and let him perform the slicing, and pliering, and supergluing on his own. I felt bruised and blistered everywhere inside.

Still shaken, I joined Dad in shaving Lorelei's head, removing her ears, and stitching Arlene's on. But when it came time to scalp my dear sweet Rhonda, I couldn't bring myself—in spite of my lust for her lovely blonde hair—to help him grasp and guide the X-Acto knife and the scraping tools. Instead, I tried, over the static of my father's anger, to soothe Rhonda's torments. I assured her, though I'd begun to doubt it myself, that once she left her own body and moved into Lorelei's with Arlene, she'd come to appreciate the diligence with which we had harvested her hair and understand that the agonies we were putting her through were worth the final result. She did nothing but scream bloody murder and strain her abraded limbs against her bonds.

I wept openly then, while Dad bent, grim-faced, to his bloody task and pressed the blonde skullcap down onto Lorelei's bare, glue-smearsed scalp.

Next came the mammarys. There was little point in giving our lovely new bride long tumbling blonde tresses if what they tumbled down onto was a couple of flat nubs rather than the breathtaking swell of two hefty kissable lickable squeezable suckable breasts. Dad and I were used to that kind of pleasure, given the endowments of our old wives. But we found ourselves once again at loggerheads, and it was worse now because Dad had by this time lost all patience with me. Rhonda and Arlene both sported superb knockers and we were not about to break up a set by taking one from each woman. Yet

Lorelei barely had room on her chest for *two* decent-sized tits, let alone four. In the end we decided to fasten one pair to her front and another to her back. I lost the coin toss, but I don't think it's sour grapes to say that I got the better of the bargain, because our first mastectomy came off rather badly and in my opinion—You just keep still, Dad!—in my opinion, we botched Arlene's breasts badly. When it came to Rhonda, who was pleading like a little girl at this point, I was ready to refuse the carving knife again, but Dad jammed an awl into my left arm. Then he gave me a powerful talking to, really chewing me out good—"The next time it's your balls, boy!" that sort of thing. I *know* you meant it, Dad; just shut your yap. Anyway, partly because of what Dad said and partly because I wanted the job done right, I helped with the second operation, which I believe we carried out with a greater sense of professionalism and pride. What did I care about having to go behind our new woman's back to get to Rhonda's breasts as long as they retained their full loveliness?

We were in the midst of the arduous task of making a vulval triptych across Lorelei's stretched inner thighs, parenthesizing Lorelei's pussy with the harvested quims of our wives, when there came a distant pounding at the door, and a trio of faces filling one windowpane briefly with ugliness, and then a loud intrusive sound like crunching wood. One pair of arms grabbed us from behind and another handcuffed us, and the rest of the night was nothing but sirens and naked rides and cold baths and damp blankets and question after question after question. You know the rest. Aside from discounting our reincarnation story and sensationalizing out of all proportion what we did, the *Bee* and the *Union* did a fair job of reporting the truth.

What did we learn from all this?

We learned that happiness can't be forced. It's not something that yields to a desperate scheme and a crosscut saw. It's not something you can construct. We tried to piece it together bit by bit and we failed. Those of you out there whose minds may be starting to warp the same way ours did, take my advice and forget it. If kind words and gentle persuasion don't get you what you want, then cheese graters and electric drills and large knives with serrated edges aren't going to do it either. We tried. We failed. And we're going to pay for it. Next time, whoever's body we end up in, we're not even going to think about doing anything like this again.

At least I won't.

Dad tells me *he's* planning to major in pre-med.

Robert Devereaux nursed at the dark and light breasts of the moon, breathed vast stores of folly from the dancing air, and was gratefully deflowered by a succubus from the land of purple and the penguins. Kris Rusch called his debut piece "Fructus in Eden" (PULPHOUSE99) "a truly dangerous story," and she is right. His novel *Santa Steps Out*, now seeking a publisher, probes the deviant side of Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny. Robert's current project, *Deadweight*, is a novel about green thumbs, graves, and penile implants.

Resurrections

Edited with Introduction by
George Clayton Johnson

By now you know that RESURRECTIONS is a department in the magazine devoted to reprinting often overlooked masterpiece stories by modern masters, to establish standards for our contributors.

In the first issue of INQUITIES we chose Richard Matheson's little creeper, "Witch War". In issue two you got your chance to reach Charles Beaumont's desolate, "A Place Of Meeting". In issue three we invite you to experience A.E. van Vogt's "Enchanted Village."

To me Van Vogt is the Grand Master of Science Fiction whose influence on the field is vastly underrated.

When I was twelve or thirteen or fourteen and reading everything I could get my hands on, Van Vogt was hot. His name on a magazine cover sold copies. I read THE WORLD OF NULL A, SLAN and THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER as serials in lurid magazines and looked forward eagerly to the next story he might write.

I prowled salvation army stores, digging through cardboard boxes of pulp magazines with garish slick covers searching for his earlier stories. They talked of marvels in matter of fact tones. They contained strange wisdoms. They alarmed me with suggested possibilities. They invaded deep layers of my mind.

For van Vogt, writing is a form of brain surgery with the writer operating on the brain of the reader, making new connections with carefully chosen word symbols, rejustifying all the linkages, changing the readers thinking and ways of thinking by giving him provocative information.

It is a precise business that calls for total attention to the smallest detail, for every new word forces the reader's brain to re-evaluate its own contents.

van Vogt is the greatest medicine for anyone suffering from an inferiority complex, who masks it with an attitude of superiority that I can think of. His heroes are Supermen. Their weapons are *mind* and its curious powers. He writes from the inside. His heroes feel and think, sometimes confusedly as we do ourselves. His is a world of close shots and gigantic visions — a colossal world often spanning galaxies.

A.E. van Vogt's story, "Enchanted Village" was first published in *Other Worlds* in 1950. It is a formula story, the formula is the classic dramatic form of the three act play. Act 1: We see the situation that provokes the hero to seek a goal, bringing in the human *will*. With this, *drama* begins as we participate, through identification, in the intentness with which the hero is aware of his goal and the means he is employing in achieving it. Act 2: We see the tests and obstacles that beset him on his way to his goal that brings him to his lowest moment and eminent failure. Act 3: A highly compressed act consisting of the prepared for reversal, the escape, the chase, the final confrontation (where all the chickens come home to roost), and the resolution where we are brought to realize the *meaning* of what has happened with implications for the future.

Ray Bradbury once told me that "plot" is the footprints left in the snow made by the hero as he runs by on his way to his goal. van Vogt's story is plotted according to this formula and quite satisfying for this hidden reason.

It is a marvelous example of the plotted story. It so impressed me when I first read it that I typed the story out on regular 8 1/2 by 11

typewriter paper so that I could compare it with my own writings, trying to find out what there was about it that made it a saleable story. I was much concerned with answers to the question "What is a story?" I knew somehow that the answer could be found in the "plotting". What is Van Vogt doing here as he tells of the seemingly unselected incidents of the life of this shipwrecked spaceman? Why has van Vogt arranged the incidents as he has, in the telling so that he leads you to his surprise ending?

Barry Malsberg, a man who understands van Vogt better than most, writing about A.E. Van Vogt said: "Alfred Elton van Vogt, a Californian-by-way-of-Canada, sold his first story, "Black Destroyer" to John W. Campbell in early 1939, and subsequently became identified with five or six other writers (Heinlein, Assimov, Kuttner, Del Rey, Hubbard, Leiber) as fixtures of the first so-called "Golden Age" of science fiction. Alfred Elton van Vogt may be the most difficult of all science fiction writers to judge. So much of van Vogt's work, reread after many years, seems to work in terms which are sub- or trans-literary; so much of his power seems to come not from sophisticated technique and/or pyrotechnic style as from his ability to tap archetypal power, archetypal "Theme", and open up veins of awe or bedazzlement that otherwise are found in love or dreams."

Malsberg goes on to write about van Vogt's ability to "deliver (a) total alienness within (b) a hugely panoramic background that (c) seemingly lacked reason and yet came together to (d) end by making total, if terrifying, sense."

Here, Malsberg may be talking about the *surreal*.

Andre Breton in his *Second Surrealist Manifesto* (1929) said, "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a spot in the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the high and the low, the communicable and the incommunicable will cease to appear contradictory."

Van Vogt has led me to this spot many times.

So deeply did Van Vogt's writings strike me in my youth that later, meeting Van Vogt and getting to know him at conventions and gatherings, I suggested an evening alone with just he and I to discuss whatever might come up. Surprisingly he agreed and one Friday evening I was invited to his impressive hillside home where the two of us quickly found ourselves in his "office".

As you can well imagine, I had so much emotion bound up in van Vogt that evening proved to be one of the most illuminating and cathartic six hours I have ever spent. I hope to write of it at a later time, but for now I will pass over what happened between us except to say that he became one of my dearest friends.

When I got home I realized I had left my harmonica behind. I also realized that I had come away with the pencil from his writing table. It glittered bright red with reflective light. On its side was printed a word in a kind of Coca Cola script. The word was "fascination".

I called him the next day to confess my theft. He told me to keep the pencil. He told me to write with it. I told him to keep the harmonica. I told him to play it. I hoped it might remind him to breathe.

ENCHANTED VILLAGE

by
A. E. Van Vogt

Explorers of a new frontier they had been called before they left for Mars.

For awhile after the ship crashed into a Martian desert, killing all on board except—miraculously—this one man, Bill Jenner spat the words occasionally into the constant, sandladen wind. He despised himself for the pride he had felt when he first heard them.

His fury faded with each mile that he walked, and his black grief for his friends became a gray ache. Slowly he realized that he had made a ruinous misjudgment.

He had underestimated the speed at which the rocketship had been traveling. He'd guessed that he would have to walk three hundred miles to reach the shallow, Polar sea he and the others had observed as they glided in from outer space. Actually, the ship must have flashed immensely greater distance before it hurtled down out of control.

The days stretched behind him, seemingly as numberless as the hot, red, alien sand that scorched through his tattered clothes. This huge scarecrow of a man kept moving across the endless, arid waste; he would not give up.

By the time he came to the mountain, his food had long been gone. Of his four waterbags, only one remained; and that was so close to being empty that he merely wet his cracked lips and swollen tongue whenever his thirst became unbearable.

Jenner climbed high before he realized that it was not just another dune that had barred his way. He paused, and

as he gazed up at the mountain that towered above him, he cringed a little. For an instant, he felt the hopelessness of this mad race he was making to nowhere—but he reached the top. He saw that below him was a depression surrounded by hills as high or higher than the one on which he stood. Nestled in the valley they made was a village.

He could see trees, and the marble floor of a courtyard. A score of buildings were clustered around what seemed to be a central square. They were mostly low-constructed, but there were four towers pointing gracefully into the sky. They shone in the sunlight with a marble luster.

Faintly, there came to Jenner's ears a thin, high-pitched whistling sound. It rose, fell, faded completely, then came up again clearly and unpleasantly. Even as Jenner ran toward it, the noise grated on his ears, eerie and unnatural.

He kept slipping on smooth rock, and bruised himself when he fell. He rolled halfway down into the valley. The buildings remained new and bright, when seen from nearby. Their walls flashed with reflections. On every side was vegetation—reddish-green shrubbery—yellow-green trees laden with purple and red fruit.

With ravenous intent, Jenner headed for the nearest fruit tree. Close up, the tree looked dry and brittle. The large red fruit he tore from the lowest branch however, was plump and juicy.

As he lifted it to his mouth, he remembered that he had been warned during his training period to taste nothing on

Mars until it had been chemically examined. But that was meaningless advice to a man whose only chemical equipment was in his own body.

Nevertheless, the possibility of danger made him cautious. He took his first bite gingerly. It was bitter to his tongue, and he spat it out hastily. Some of the juice which remained in his mouth seared his gums. He felt the fire of it, and he reeled from nausea. His muscles began to jerk, and he lay down on the marble to keep himself from falling. After what seemed like hours to Jenner, the awful trembling finally went out of his body, and he could see again. He looked up despondently at the tree.

The pain finally left him, and slowly he relaxed. A soft breeze rustled the dry leaves. Nearby trees took up that gentle clamor, and it struck Jenner that the wind here in the valley was only a whisper of what it had been on the flat desert beyond the mountain.

There was no other sound now. Jenner abruptly remembered the high-pitched, ever-changing whistle he had heard. He lay very still, listening intently, but there was only the rustling of the leaves. The noisy shrilling had stopped. He wondered if it had been an alarm to warn the villagers of his approach.

Anxiously, he climbed to his feet and fumbled for his gun. A sense of disaster shook through him. It wasn't there. His mind was a blank, and then he vaguely recalled that he had first missed the weapon more than a week before. He looked around uneasily, but there was not a sign of creature life. He braced himself. He couldn't leave, as there was nowhere to go. If necessary, he would fight to the death to remain in the village.

Carefully, Jenner took a sip from his water bag, moistening his cracked lips and his swollen tongue. Then he replaced the cap, and started through a double line of trees toward the nearest building. He made a wide circle to observe it from several vantage points. One on side a low, broad archway opened into the interior. Through it, he could dimly make out the polished gleam of a marble floor.

Jenner explored the buildings from the outside, always keeping a respectful distance between him and any of the entrances. He saw no sign of animal life. He reached the far side of the marble platform on which the village was built, and turned back decisively. It was time to explore interiors.

He chose one of the four-tower buildings. As he came within a dozen feet of it, he saw that he would have to stoop low to get inside.

Momentarily, the implications of that stopped him. These buildings had been constructed for a life form that must be very different from human beings.

He went forward again, bent down and entered reluctantly, every muscle tensed.

He found himself in a room without furniture. However, there were several low, marble fences projecting from one marble wall. They formed what looked like a group of four wide, low stalls. Each stall had an open trough carved out

of the floor.

The second chamber was fitted with four inclined planes of marble, each of which slanted up to a dais. Altogether, there were four rooms on the lower floor. From one of them, a circular ramp mounted up, apparently to a tower room.

Jenner didn't investigate the upstairs. The earlier fear that he would find alien life was yielding to the deadly conviction that he wouldn't. No life meant no food, nor chance of getting any. In frantic haste, he hurried from building to building, peering into the silent rooms, pausing now and then to shout hoarsely.

Finally, there was no doubt. He was alone in a deserted village on a lifeless planet, without food, without water—except for the pitiful supply in his bag—and without hope.

He was in the fourth and smallest room of one of the tower buildings when he realized that he had come to the end of his search. The room had a single stall jutting out from one wall. Wearily, Jenner lay down in it. He must have fallen asleep instantly.

When he awoke, he became aware of two things, one right after the other. The first realization occurred before he opened his eyes—the whistling sound was back, high and shrill, it wavered at the threshold of audibility.

The other was that a fine spray of liquid was being directed down at him from the ceiling. It had no odor, of which Technician Jenner took a single whiff. Quickly, he scrambled out of the room, coughing, tears in his eyes, his face already burning from chemical reaction.

He snatched his handkerchief and hastily wiped the exposed parts of his body and face.

He reached the outside, and there he paused, striving to understand what had happened.

The village seemed unchanged.

Leaves trembled in a gentle breeze. The sun was poised on a mountain peak. Jenner guessed from its position that it was morning again, and that he had slept at least a dozen hours. The glaring white light suffused the valley. Half hidden by trees and shrubbery, the buildings flashed and shimmered.

He seemed to be in an oasis in a vast desert. It was an oasis all right, Jenner reflected grimly, but not for a human being. For him, with its poisonous fruit, it was more like a tantalizing mirage.

He went back inside the building, and cautiously peered into the room where he had slept. The spray of gas had stopped, not a bit of odor lingered, and the air was fresh and clean.

He edged over the threshold, half-inclined to make a test. He had a picture in his mind of a long dead Martian creature lazing on the floor in the stall while a soothing chemical sprayed down its body. The fact that the chemical was deadly to human beings merely emphasized how alien to man was the life that had spawned on Mars. But there seemed

little doubt of the reason for the gas. The creature was accustomed to taking a morning shower.

Inside the bathroom, Jenner eased himself feet first into the stall. As his hips came level with the stall entrance, the solid ceiling sprayed a jet of yellowish gas straight down upon his legs. Hastily, Jenner pulled himself clear of the stall. The gas stopped as suddenly as it had started.

He tried it again, to make sure it was merely an automatic process. It turned on, then it shut off.

Jenner's thirst-puffed lips parted with excitement. He thought, "If there can be one automatic process, there may be others."

Breathing heavily, he raced into the outer room. Carefully he shoved his legs into one of the two stalls. The moment his hips were in, a steaming gruel filled the tough beside the wall.

He stared at the greasy looking stuff with a horrified fascination--food--and drink. He remembered the poison fruit, and felt repelled, but he forced himself to bend down, and put his finger into the hot, wet substance. He brought it up, dripping, to his mouth.

It tasted flat and pulpy, like boiled wood fiber. It trickled viscously into his throat. His eyes began to water, and his lips drew back convulsively. He realized he was going to be sick, and ran for the outer door--but didn't quite make it.

When he finally got outside, he felt limp and unutterably listless. In that depressed state of mind, he grew aware again of the shrill sound.

He felt amazed that he could have ignored its rasping even for a few minutes. Sharply, he glanced about, trying to determine its source, but it seemed to have none. Whenever he approached a point where it appeared to be loudest, then it would fade, or shift, perhaps to the far side of the village.

He tried to imagine what an alien culture would want with a mind-shattering noise--although, of course, it would not necessarily have been unpleasant to them.

He stopped, and snapped his fingers as a wild but nevertheless plausible notion entered his mind. Could this be music?

He toyed with the idea, trying to visualize the village as it had been long ago. Here, a music-loving race had possibly gone about its daily tasks to the accompaniment of what was to them beautiful strains of melody.

The hideous whistling went on and on, waxing and waning. Jenner tried to put buildings between himself and the sound. He sought refuge in various rooms, hoping that at least one would be sound-proof. None were. The whistle followed him wherever he went.

He retreated into the desert, and had to climb halfway up one of the slopes before the noise was low enough not to disturb him. Finally, breathless but immeasurably relieved, he sank down on the sand, and thought blankly:

What now?

The scene that spread before him had in it qualities

of both heaven and hell. It was all too familiar now--the red sands, the stony dunes, the small, alien village promising so much and fulfilling so little.

Jenner looked down at it with his feverish eyes, and ran his parched tongue over his cracked, dry lips. He knew that he was a dead man unless he could alter the automatic food-making machines that must be hidden somewhere in the walls and under the floors of the buildings.

In ancient days, a remnant of Martian civilization had survived here in this village. The inhabitants had died off but the village lived on, keeping itself clean of sand, able to provide refuge for any Martian who might come along. But there were no Martians. There was only Bill Jenner, pilot of the first rocketship ever to land on Mars.

He had to make the village turn out food and drink that he could take. Without tools, except his hands; with scarcely any knowledge of chemistry, he must force it to change its habits.

Tensely, he hefted his water bag. He took another sip, and fought the same grim fight to prevent himself from guzzling it down to the last drop. And, when he had won the battle once more, he stood up and started down the slope.

He could last, he estimated, not more than three days. In that time, he must conquer the village.

He was already among the trees when it suddenly struck him that the music had stopped. Relieved, he bent over a small shrub, took a good, firm hold of it, and pulled.

It came up easily, and there was a slab of marble attached to it. Jenner stared at it, noting with surprise that he had been mistaken in thinking the stalk came up through a hole in the marble. It was merely stuck to the surface. Then he noticed something else--the shrub had no roots. Almost instinctively, Jenner looked down at the spot from which he had torn the slab of marble along with the plant. There was sand there.

He dropped the shrub, slipped to his knees, and plunged his fingers into the sand. Loose sand trickled through them. He reached deep, using all his strength to force his arm and hand down--sand--nothing but sand.

He stood up and frantically tore up another shrub. It also came easily, bringing with it a slab of marble. It had no roots, and where it had been was sand.

With a kind of mindless disbelief, Jenner rushed over to a fruit tree, and shoved at it. There was a momentary resistance, and then the marble on which it stood split, and lifted slowly into the air. The tree fell over with a swish and a crackle as its dry branches and leaves broke and crumbled in a thousand pieces. Underneath where it had been was sand.

Sand everywhere. A city built on sand. Mars, planet of sand. That was not completely true, of course. Seasonal vegetation had been observed near the polar icecaps. All but the hardiest of it died with the coming of summer. It had been intended that the rocketship land near one of those shallow, tideless seas.

By coming down out of control, the ship had wrecked more than itself. It had wrecked the chances for life of the only

survivor of the voyage.

Jenner came slowly out of his daze. He had a thought then. He picked up one of the shrubs he had already torn loose, braced his foot against the marble to which it was attached and tugged, gently at first, then with increasing strength.

It came loose finally, but there was no doubt that the two were part of a whole. The shrub was growing out of the marble.

Marble? Jenner knelt beside one of the holes from which he had torn a slab, and bent over an adjoining section. It was quite porous—calcareous rock, most likely, but not true marble at all. As he reached toward it, intending to break off a piece, it changed color. Astounded, Jenner drew back. Around the break, the stone was turning a bright orange-yellow. He studied it uncertainly, then tentatively touched it.

It was as if he had dipped his fingers into searing acid. There was a sharp, biting, burning pain. With a gasp, Jenner jerked his hand clear.

The continuing anguish made him feel faint. He swayed and moaned, clutching the bruised members to his body. When the agony finally faded, and he could look at the injury, he saw that the skin had peeled, and that blood blisters had already formed. Grimly, Jenner looked down at the break in the stone. The edges remained bright orange-yellow.

The village was alert, ready to defend itself from further attacks.

Suddenly weary, he crawled into the shade of a tree. There was only one possible conclusion to draw from what had happened, and it almost defied common sense. This lonely village was alive.

As he lay there, Jenner tried to imagine a great mass of living substance growing into the shape of buildings, adjusting itself to suit another life form, accepting the role of servant in the widest meaning of the term.

If it would serve one race, why not another? If it could adjust to Martians, why not to human beings?

There would be difficulties, of course. He guessed wearily that essential elements would not be available. The oxygen for water could come from the air...thousands of compounds could be made from sand...though it meant death if he failed to find a solution. He fell asleep even as he started to think about what they might be.

When he awoke, it was quite dark.

Jenner climbed heavily to his feet. There was a drag to his muscles that alarmed him. He wet his mouth from his water bag, and staggered toward the entrance of the nearest building. Except from the scraping of his shoes on the marble, the silence was intense.

He stopped short—listened, and looked. The wind had died away. He couldn't see the mountains that rimmed the valley, but the buildings were still dimly visible, black shadows in a shadowy world.

For the first time, it seemed to him that, in spite of

his new hope, it might be better if he died. Even if he survived, what had he to look forward to? Only too well he recalled how hard it had been to rouse interest in the trip, and to raise the large amount of money required. He remembered the colossal problems that had to be solved in building the ship, and some of the men who had solved them were buried somewhere in the Martian desert.

It might be twenty years before another ship from Earth would try to reach the only other planet in the solar system that had shown signs of being able to support life.

During those uncountable days and nights, those years, he would be here alone. That was the most he could hope for—if he lived. As he fumbled his way to a dais in one of the rooms, Jenner considered another problem.

How did one let a living village know that it must alter its processes? In a way, it must already have grasped that it had a new tenant. How could he make it realize he needed food in a different chemical combination that which it had served in the past; that he liked music, but on a different scale system; and that he could use a shower each morning—of water, not of poison gas?

He dozed fitfully, like a man who is sick rather than sleepy. Twice, he awakened, his lips on fire, his eyes burning, his body bathed in perspiration. Several times he was startled into consciousness by the sound of his own harsh voice crying out in anger and fear at the night.

He guessed, then, that he was dying.

He spent the long hours of darkness tossing, turning, twisting, befuddled by waves of heat. As the light of morning came, he was vaguely surprised to realize that he was still alive. Restlessly, he climbed off the dais, and went to the door.

A biting cold wind blew, but it felt good to his hot face. He wondered if there was enough *pneumococcus* in his blood for him to catch pneumonia. He decided not.

In a few moments he was shivering. He retreated back into the house, and for the first time noticed that, despite the doorless doorway, the wind did not come into the building at all. The rooms were cold, but not draughty.

That started an association: Where had his terrible body heat come from? He teetered over to the dais where he had spent the night. Within seconds, he was sweltering in a temperature of about a hundred and thirty.

He climbed off the dais, shaken by his own stupidity. He estimated that he had sweated at least two quarts of moisture out of his dried-up body on that furnace of a bed.

This village was not for human beings. Here, even the beds were heated for creatures who needed temperatures far beyond the heat comfortable for men.

Jenner spent most of the day in the shade of a large tree. He felt exhausted, and only occasionally did he even remember that he had a problem. When the whistling started, it bothered him at first, but he was too tired to move away from it. There were long periods when he hardly heard it, so dulled were his senses.

Late in the afternoon, he remembered the shrubs and the tree he had torn up the day before, and wondered what had happened to them. He wet his swollen tongue with the last few drops of water in his bag, climbed lackadaisically to his feet, and went to look for the dried-up remains.

There weren't any. He couldn't even find the holes where he had torn them out. The living village had absorbed the dead tissue into itself, and repaired the breaks in its body.

That galvanized Jenner. He began to think again...about mutations, genetic readjustment, lifeforms adapting to new environments. There'd been lectures on that before the ship left Earth, rather generalized talks designed to acquaint the explorers with the problems men might face on an alien planet. The important principle was quite simple: adjust or die.

The village had to adjust to him. He doubted if he could seriously damage it, but he could try. His own need to survive must be placed on as sharp and hostile a basis as that.

Frantically, Jenner began to search his pockets. Before leaving the rocket, he had loaded himself with odds and ends of small equipment. A jackknife, a folding metal cup, a printed radio, a tiny super-battery that could be charged by spinning an attached wheel--and for which he had brought along, among other things, a powerful electric fire lighter.

Jenner plugged the lighter into the battery and deliberately scraped the red-hot end along the surface of the marble. The reaction was swift. The substance turned an angry purple this time. When an entire section of the floor had changed color, Jenner headed for the nearest stall trough, entering far enough to activate it.

There was a noticeable delay. When the food finally flowed into the trough, it was clear that the living village had realized the reason for what he had done. The food was a pale, creamy color, where earlier it had been a murky gray.

Jenner put his finger into it, but withdrew it with a yell, and wiped his finger. It continued to sting for several moments. The vital question was: had it deliberately offered him food that would damage him, or was it trying to appease him without knowing what he could eat?

He decided to give it another chance, and entered the adjoining stall. The gritty stuff that flooded up this time was yellower. It didn't burn his finger, but Jenner took one taste, and spat it out. He had the feeling that he had been offered a soup made of a greasy mixture of clay and gasoline.

He was thirsty now with a need heightened by the unpleasant taste in his mouth. Desperately, he rushed outside and tore open the water bag, seeking wetness inside. In his fumbling eagerness, he spilled a few precious drops onto the courtyard. Down he went on his face, and licked them up.

Half a minute later, he was still licking, and there was still water.

The fact penetrated suddenly. He raised himself, and gazed wonderingly at the droplets of water that sparkled on the smooth stone. As he watched, another one squeezed up from the apparently solid surface, and shimmered in the light of the sinking sun.

He bent, and with the tip of his tongue sponged up each visible drop. For a long time, he lay with his mouth pressed to the marble, sucking up the tiny bits of water that the village doled out to him.

The glowing white sun disappeared behind a hill. Night fell, like the dropping of a black screen. The air turned cold, then icy. He shivered as the wind keened through his ragged clothes. But what finally stopped him was the collapse of the surface from which he had been drinking.

Jenner lifted himself in surprise, and in the darkness gingerly felt over the stone. It had genuinely crumbled. Evidently the substance had yielded up its available water and had disintegrated in the process. Jenner estimated that he had drunk altogether an ounce of water.

It was a convincing demonstration of the willingness of the village to please him, but there was another, less satisfying implication. If the village had to destroy a part of itself every time it gave him a drink, then clearly the supply was not unlimited.

Jenner hurried inside the nearest building, climbed onto a dais--and climbed off again hastily, as the heat blazed up at him. He waited, to give the Intelligence a chance to realize he wanted a change, then lay down once more. The heat was as great as ever.

He gave that up because he was too tired to persist, and too sleepy to think of a method that might let the village know he needed a different bedroom temperature. He slept on the floor with an uneasy conviction that it could *not* sustain him for long. He woke up many times during the night, and thought: "Not enough water. No matter how hard it tries--" then he would sleep again, only to wake once more, tense and unhappy.

Nevertheless, morning found him briefly alert; and all his steely determination was back--that iron willpower that had brought him at least five hundred miles across an unknown desert.

He headed for the nearest trough. This time, after he had activated it, there was a pause of more than a minute; and then about a thimbleful of water made a wet splotch at the bottom.

Jenner licked it dry, then waited hopefully for more. When none came, he reflected gloomily that somewhere in the village, an entire group of cells had broken down and released their water for him.

Then and there he decided that it was up to the human being, who could move around, to find a new source of water for the village, which could not move.

In the interim, of course, the village would have to keep him alive, until he had investigated the possibilities. That meant, above everything else, he must have some food to sustain him while he looked around.

He began to search his pockets. Toward the end of his food supply, he had carried scraps and pieces wrapped in small bits of cloth. Crumbs had broken off into the pocket and he had searched often during those long days in the desert.

Now by actually ripping the seams, he discovered tiny particles of meat and bread, little bits of grease and other unidentifiable substances.

Carefully, he leaned over the adjoining stall, and placed the scrapings in the trough there. The village would not be able to offer him more than a reasonable facsimile. If the spilling of a few drops on the courtyard could make it aware of his need for water, then a similar offering might give it the clue it needed as to the chemical nature of the food he could eat.

Jenner waited, then entered the second stall and activated it. About a pint of thick, creamy substance trickled into the bottom of the trough. The smallness of the quantity seemed evidence that perhaps it contained water.

He tasted it. It had a sharp, musty flavor, and a stale odor. It was almost as dry as flour—but his stomach did not reject it.

Jenner ate slowly, acutely aware that at such moments as this the village had him at its mercy. He could never be sure that one of the food ingredients was not a slow acting poison.

When he had finished the meal, he went to a food trough in another building. He refused to eat the food that came up, but activated still another trough. This time he received a few drops of water.

He had come purposefully to one of the tower buildings. Now, he started up the ramp that led to the upper floor. He paused only briefly in the room he came to, as he had already discovered that they seemed to be additional bedrooms. The familiar dais was there in a group of three.

What interested him was that the circular ramp continued to wind on upward. First, to another, smaller room that seemed to have no particular reason for being. Then it would go on up to the top of the tower, some seventy feet above the ground. It was high enough for him to see beyond the rim of all the surrounding hilltops. He had thought it might be, but he had been too weak to make the climb before. Now, he looked out to every horizon. Almost immediately, the hope that had brought him up, faded.

The view was immeasurably desolate. As far as he could see was an arid waste, and every horizon was hidden in a mist of wind-blown sand.

Jenner gazed with a sense of despair. If there was a Martian sea out there somewhere, it was beyond his reach.

Abruptly, he clenched his hands in anger against his fate, which seemed inevitable now. At the very worst, he had hoped he would find himself in a mountainous region. Seas and mountains were generally the two main sources of water. He should have known, of course, that there were very few mountains on Mars. It would have been a wild coincidence if he had actually run into a mountain range.

His fury faded, because he lacked the strength to sustain any emotion. Numbly, he went down the ramp.

His vague plan to help the village ended as swiftly and finally as that.

The days drifted by, but as to how many he had no

idea. Each time he went to eat, a smaller amount of water was doled out to him. Jenner kept telling himself that each meal would have to be his last. It was unreasonable for him to expect the village to destroy itself when his fate was certain now.

What was worse, it became increasingly clear that the food was not good for him. He had misled the village as to his needs by giving it stale, perhaps even tainted samples, and prolonged the agony for himself. At times after he had eaten, Jenner felt dizzy for hours. All too frequently, his head ached, and his body shivered with fever.

The village was doing what it could. The rest was up to him, and he couldn't even adjust to an approximation of Earth food.

For two days, he was too sick to drag himself to one of the troughs. Hour after hour, he lay on the floor. Some time during the second night, the pain in his body grew so terrible that he finally made up his mind.

"If I can get to a dais," he told himself, "the heat alone will kill me; and in absorbing my body, the village will get back some of its lost water."

He spent at least an hour crawling laboriously up the ramp of the nearest dais, and when he finally made it, he lay as one already dead. His last waking thought was: "Beloved friends, I'm coming."

The hallucination was so complete that momentarily, he seemed to be back in the control room of the rocketship, and all around him were his former companions.

With a sigh of relief, Jenner sank into dreamless sleep.

He woke to the sound of a violin. It was a sad-sweet music that told of the rise and fall of a race long dead.

Jenner listened for a while, and then with abrupt excitement realized the truth. This was a substitute for the whistling—the village had adjusted its music to him!

Other sensory phenomena stole in upon him. The dais felt comfortably warm, not hot at all. He had a feeling of wonderful physical well-being.

Eagerly, he scrambled down the ramp to the nearest food stall. As he crawled forward, his nose close to the floor, the trough filled with a steamy mixture. The odor was so rich and pleasant that he plunged his face into it, and slopped it up greedily. It had the flavor of thick, meaty soup, and was warm and soothing to his lips and mouth. When he had eaten it all, he did not need a drink of water for the first time.

I've won, he thought. The village has found a way!

After a while, he remembered something, and crawled to the bathroom. Cautiously, watching the ceiling, he eased himself backward into the shower stall. The yellowish spray came down, cool and delightful.

Ecstatically, Jenner wriggled his four-foot tail, and lifted his long snout to let the thin streams of liquid wash away the food impurities that clung to his sharp teeth.

Then he waddled out to bask in the sun, and listen to the timeless music.



By the show's end, Jerry Lewis could cry on a moment's notice. All night I'd watched him use different tactics, some requiring the presence of saddened celebrities, others as simple as gazing ruefully at the contribution console and quivering when its circus-sized digits flipped. Now don't think I'm boorish. I care, I care more than the lot of you. It's my caring, for the pain in a woman's face when she loses her cab to a callous suit-&-tie and for the kid who's more interested in the champagnes of his knee scabs than in the pain they give him--it's my caring that lost me Chicago, gained me a filthy room in Washington, D.C., and lost me the most important man in my life.

den, Michael Jordan and several jiggling Lovabulls, Capone t-shirts and Bud Dry clocks auctioned off--and had only gone to the bar as part of a Girl's Night Out.

The girls I was going to meet worked to points north and west of my current lecturing job; I had been at the Delaware Towers explaining computer operating systems to a leasing company based in Oak Brook Terrace. Marnie had a daytime bartending job at the Hard Rock Cafe and you couldn't persuade her to stay a minute past punch-out time, unless maybe you sauntered in with John Malkovich on your arm, Shelby--really, her name is Michelle Beatrice--worked at a Kroch's & Brentano's on Wabash.

THE PAIN DETAIL

by
Wayne Allen Sallee
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Illustrations by H.E. Fassl

My original prologue was mired in emotional convolutions; the way I'd begun, you'd have thought Nick and I had known each other for a million years. For your information, we've known--*had* known each other for only two years.

(I want to keep this short; the loss of feeling in my right hand snakes slowly to the left. You should, however, know everything.)

Nick and I met at Eliot Ness's *Untouchables* on the night the management staged a benefit for MDA. I knew nothing of the "festivities"--the dunk tank in the beer gar-

Untouchables is off the Division Street drag, at the corner of Rush and Guignol, and it seemed a good enough place to meet. No missing each other at El stops or street corners, crap like that I don't need anyways. When I went to the front desk of the Towers for messages, there were two. Seems someone who looked a lot like John Malkovich had shown up at the Cafe, so Marnie had bowed out. Michelle Beatrice had another, similar excuse involving a man who had his pockets full of something.

I could see the neon Ness, cigarette dangling from a

PAIN DETAIL

minimalist mouth, from the front doors of the hotel. I needed to unwind; three hours of lecturing computer innovations to a mausoleum full of starry eyes and cavernous yawns was enough for this girl to buy the damn bartender himself a shot of top-shelf bourbon.

Instead, I met Nick. He had taken the seat beside me, nursing a Diet 7-Up and grinning at everything, even at the rude couple behind him who thought it was marvelous "those poor souls" could attend their own events. They were evidently referring to two men in wheelchairs near the front entrance. Truth be told, I hadn't even been aware of a benefit for the handicapped going on; I simply figured that it was a male-bonding sports thing. Rah-rah.

I watched him, trying not to be as obvious as the couple, and was charmed by his easy manner. "It's the money, you know," he said, leaning close. "All this money changing hands. I know I sound cynical, but the way these folks float around here, dishing out checks and credit cards, you'd think this was a highbrow streetcorner. Sure, it's all for a good cause--and the Muscular Dystrophy people can use every penny--but I don't know; there's something exploitative about it all." Then he laughed, sank back into an easy smile. I matched his grin, tooth for tooth. "I suppose I shouldn't think so much" was the last thing he said before asking for my phone number.

My fixation with pain began the day I burned my hand on stove-top grease.

We left the bar together, but would take separate cars to separate homes. He struggled with his overcoat in front of the club, chattering idly, as if there was something holy in dialogue, something medicinal. Embarrassed at the moment it came out, I asked if I could help. He attempted to recoil from my assistance and fell against me. By the time we'd righted ourselves, we were practically breathless with laughter. I don't think we were laughing from the same private places.

Within a week, phone conversations between Nick and I were daily fare, actual dates almost as frequent. My firm, Inacomputers, towered in a crowded corner of One IBM Plaza. Because Nick worked down about Dvorak Park, at Rolling Stone Records, we would meet after work at a Dubliner pub on the corner of Huron and Wabash. He'd arrive with a sheaf of precariously bound papers--his novel, about which I quickly and persistently inquired. I had been pleased to discover Nick's artistic side. Working in the sterile empire of microchips and IGA logic boards made me particularly receptive to Nick's spirited discourses on literature and poetry.

By the end of autumn we'd sat through our first telethon together and had attended two benefit banquets. The

only time we spent apart was when my job required I travel. Each trip was a difficult distance to endure, but the reach confirmed my love for Nick. Upon returning, I'd be assailed by wonderful stories and poems, most of which bared Nick's passion for me.

As clear as our mutual sentiments were, sex did not enter our relationship until the first summer. I now know I lacked an understanding of the body's lessons, that I was unable to espy the distress behind Nick's pleasant face, his peculiar attention to the minutiae of pain and pleasure. Sometimes I came on too strongly, charging the space between us with wordless wants. It's impossible to soothe a hurting soul and evoke passion in the same moment, but I tried, explaining that his handicap meant nothing if we worked together. "Work together, work together--how many times have I been expected to 'work together,'" he'd whisper, and would cry until sleep overcame us.

I miss him so much.

Nick didn't have M. D.; he had cerebral palsy. He'd laugh and say he was one of Jerry's "foster" kids. He had a wonderful laugh. It would start as a tic in his right cheek, the kind David Janssen had in *The Fugitive*, a show Nick watched regularly. Then the sensation would escalate, as if someone were tickling an unseen spot. He was laughing when he stepped off the plane at Dulles airport, outside Washington, D.C. The plane had been delayed three hours, but Nick had plumbed the most comical perversities out of an otherwise infuriating experience. There had been an octogenarian stewardess with varicose veins so profound Nick could only stare, stifling laughter as she aired coy delights for the Moose Lodge up front. And the Lodge's Grand Poopah, with his squeaky voice as he tried to govern his drunken charges. Nick had taken notes on the Poopah, had marveled at his *laissez faire* posture and the schoolyard impotence of his scoldings.

Nick stopped laughing, later, when I showed him the scars. But that was later.

At last, we made love. Nick investigated my body, sometimes tenderly, other times harshly, as I was eager to meet his nibbles with pinches and paddlings of my own. A new door had been opened, and we were stronger for passing through it.

Curled together at the foot of the bed one night, he told me of a strange dream he'd had as a teenager. A group of "enlightened" scientists from another world had abducted him, but had summarily rejected him because he was crippled. The dream had stuck with him all these years, its extensions felt in the world around him through the brutal aura of our own "enlightened." Somehow, he'd harnessed the anguish, generating a gentler path for himself.

My fixation with pain began the day I burned my hand on stove-top grease. Nick and I spent the weekend together; attended a showing of the restored *Lawrence of Arabia*, dined at a Philippine restaurant, and indulged worn senses with several Norwegian beers. When I cried out, he dashed into the kitchen. He must have thought I'd seen a rat or one of the swamp things about which he often wrote and read; when he saw I'd hurt myself, he shuddered, then quickly composed himself.

He retreated to the living room while I rubbed a butter pat over my palm. Puzzled by his squeamishness, I thought to confront him. I stopped at the threshold and overheard him praying that my pain—which wasn't that terrific—be given to him, because he would know what to do with it, how to disburse it through his limbs. He didn't pray in the strict sense; rather, he *asked*. On occasion, when we were both tired and talking to hear ourselves, he remarked on the creator as a plural entity. The Givers of Pain and Rapture, he called them, a term he'd picked up from a story he'd read years earlier. He said the label fit, and that modern religious institutions failed on every level. Their insular regard for temporal details angered him. Pain, he'd point out, was the foundation upon which all denominations had been built, and that in the relief of pain, they all flunked. It frightened me, just a little, but he really believed he was a funnel for others' anguish.

I believed him; rather, I didn't *disbelieve* him. I'd watch him reading on the couch some nights. As his mind strayed from muscular supervision, his right shoulder would slump, his right elbow resting on his gut, his neck and feet pantomiming less-rigid attitudes. And sometimes, as though my vigilance were a clarion, he'd address me quietly, saying the pain gave his body new detail.

(The pen falls away from me; the scars possess a life of their own, and I am reminded that more than the body receives new detail.)

In November, Inacomputers sent me to Washington, D.C. to speak on the enhanced capabilities of IBM's new PS4/Quatro series. I asked Nick along, but Rolling Stone Records had to hold him until the end of the month. He would fly east as soon as possible. Together, we'd be away from The Wind.

Washington's warmth and pastoral vistas kept me pleasantly distracted. The evenings were tougher. I had been

booked at the Shoreham, at the fringe of Woodley Park and the zoo, in a double bed. I spent my nights semi-consciously; the rare hours I nodded off I dreamt of featureless, almost gaseous torture victims, some of whom addressed me by name, all of whom had given up the flesh.

After several days of power lunches and personal preparation, a limousine shuttled me to the formidable Ad-derly-Bass Compound. The lecture hall was on the eighth floor, sandwiched between a pharmaceutical company's laboratories and the marketing branch of a European cosmetic firm. The rest of the building belonged to a presumably inconsequential division of the Department of Health and Human Resources. The building directory was less of a guide than a doctoral poster board—I wandered into and out of a dozen lax security areas before finding the lecture hall.

I'd arrived early enough to sit for a cup of coffee in the seventh floor cafeteria. While in line to pay a lipless cashier, I dropped a creamer tub. Bending to pick it up, I banged my head against the tray ledge. I heard snippets of a nearby conversation and was certain my sudden headache had slung me into a fantasy—two women were discussing something called the "pain detail."

"I'll have to transfer soon," one of them, a harried redhead said. Between clipped syllables, she bit her lip until "Ravishing Rouge" had cloaked her teeth. "Larry says there's new funding coming in for the project. Christ, that means this is all for real, that they're in this for the long haul. Soon—" she lowered and shook her head. "...very soon."

The other, shorter and livid with unspent energy, said, "Well, I just don't believe they're continuing with this line of research. Have you seen some of the volunteers they're bussing in? And then a few days after surgery?"

"I've noticed. Last week, an application passed over



PAIN DETAIL

my desk for a Korean-Vet. Can you believe it? Larry's people said he was perfect--" Their voices trailed off as they toted their trays to a table at the far end of the room. I threw down too much change at the register and followed quickly. More than the nebulous subject of their conversation, the hopelessness in their voices struck me oddly, as if they'd glimpsed something apocalyptic.

I'd never been particularly nosy, but I had a good grasp of gossip graces. I gave them my name; then, for reasons that drive any moth toward fire, I lied.

"I'm with Procurement," I said. "Second floor."

The women relaxed, so I plied them for information. What did they do? How did they feel about this new funding? Where was it all leading?

The "pain detail" wasn't solely a Washington operation. With research centers from Japan to Long Island Sound's Plum Island--which they referred to as the Manimal Farm--this outfit was bigger than its anonymity suggested.

The redhead, Samantha, was the type of woman who awoke each morning to acquire and transmit information. She'd been with the government long enough to understand security measures, but that didn't stop her from sifting data through a mask of casual observations.

The detail involved the infiltration of localized nerve centers, something she called "pain training." It included electro-shock therapy, subcutaneous and complex cerebral implants, synapse drivers, and something chiefly hush-hush the administration was counting on to launch them into a new era in physiological management. Samantha, leaning closer like a Berlin-café conspirator, began explaining the recent emphasis on "sub-rosa bags," which were surgically implanted between bone and muscle tissue. The shorter woman, after studying me for several minutes, cut her co-worker short. Following nervous goodbyes, they left.

The seed--which has sprouted into the learning of a lifetime--was planted later that night. I was in my hotel room, horny, and largely ashamed of the sensation. If I could concentrate on something else, something aside from the feel of Nick's body against mine, I could overcome any obstacle. The way I'd felt the night I burned my palm and earlier, when I'd banged my head; those had been pointed distractions, rerouting all perceptions to a single island of concern. But the more I thought about my inability to distinguish relaxation from control, the more I thought of Nick, who lacked control yet possessed more of it than anyone I knew.

I turned on the TV, flipped to a local station. The seed, as if it had flown in the window, lodged in my throat. A Jerry Lewis movie was on, the one with Stella Stevens and a trip to the moon. Like a clue of forgotten folk, Nick was there, leaping invisibly from the screen, with his sound philosophy and his private discourse with gods more sensible than my own.

We always have choices, but that night I had none. I swallowed the seed, and slept soundly for it.

At precisely the same time each morning, I arrived at Adderly-Bass and haunted the cafeteria. I despaired of ever finding the women, but on the third morning, I spotted Samantha. Hurriedly, we planned a girls-night-out for Friday

and went about our business.

That night I was afire with the possibilities before me. I wanted more than anything to call Nick and tell him what was going to happen. I knew better. The high of approaching change was enough to move me, skipping over every doubt, but a word from Nick would again fasten me in a casket of painless detachment. That I couldn't bear; I would wait.

Again, sleep came easily. I dreamt of Chicago. Nick and I were walking down Sheffield, near Wrigley Field. I heard the static roar of Cubs fans in the bleachers. Dazzling sunlight on broken blades of grass told me we were on the lip of spring. And we were in love.

Grinning grimly, Nick darted past me to a porch step. He confronted a pregnant woman hauling a laundry basket. A packet of Rinsolay lay on top of the clothes; she had it tucked under her chin to keep it from falling away.

Over her protests, Nick touched the woman's stomach. Her basket dumped its contents on the way to cement as Nick reviewed her bulge with a safecracker's alert fingertips. His hand flinched when the baby kicked. He threw back his head and screamed, "BAD! BAD! " The pitch of his voice shattered windows, silencing thousands of Cubs fans.

We always have
choices, but that
night I had none.

The woman's naval expanded. Before I could utter a word, his hand was in her gut, thrashing, and then the fetus was out, extended high above his head. The baby was covered in an egg-white glaze; one of its legs was missing. The other was only a stem, curled against the waistline like a wing on a fried chicken. The baby arced into the street, the umbilical cord pulling taut, then snapping like cheap bubble gum. The baby hit pavement and I thought, standing haplessly in the gutter, how the landing reminded me of a *bloojie*, a Polish term my aunt Darlene used for a one pound bag holding two pounds of shit. It simply exploded; tissue sprayed everywhere. I glanced back at the porch. Nick had pulled his gore-streaked arm from the screaming mother and wiped his hand across her face and breasts. He returned to my side beneath the weight of that grin, and said, "Carry on, hon, and don't look back."

I woke at three-thirty and counted stucco pellets in the ceiling until dawn.

Friday night. I took a cab to *Rumours*, the club Samantha had mentioned. Not surprisingly, it was a singles club. A row of tightly clad male buttocks rotated about the jukebox while girls much younger than I fitted dreamily from the inverted cone of one spotlight to the next. A sourceless aura of desperation surrounded everything, not least of all the patrons. The crowd was as green as any I'd seen in my travels, in its nervous attention to faces and postures and in its grotesque inability to hold alcohol. The patrons were primarily

beer drinkers; American brands mostly, and a rare politically correct import like Corona or George Killian's Red Irish Ale. A handful of liquor drinkers seemed to have been liquor drinkers through several dubious administrations, as if one morning they'd find their hangovers gone and the "Right Stuff" in their White House.

I sat at one of those sticky corner tables reserved for the singles-set's offal and watched a man chide his date for her infidelity. Normally, I'd have adopted an immediate attitude about his behavior—arguments do not belong in bars—but I could concentrate only on the young lady. She was pretty, intrepid at a glance, and something about her drew me to stare. Perhaps it was in the delicate crease of her brow, or in the arch of her thinly-disguised back, I don't know—but I saw her pain. I saw how her cruel mate was hurting her, how she had learned by rote the lesson I failed every time. The man struck blows on every invisible level. Instead of walking away a gelatinous mass, the girl sat quietly and gained baffling definition.

I wondered if Nick could be that cruel. I wondered if I would cede—and assume new detail—or walk away and remain the same as I ever was.

Sam arrived on time. She had undergone a stunning transformation, her red hair tossed up in a starched Egyptian crown, her figure slipping nicely beneath a dress no typical government worker could afford. She had some difficulty getting to me, as half a dozen penis driven drunkards bent over backward—one or two literally—to win her attentions. She waved them all aside and sat down.

She was not much of a drinker. After four Harvey Wallbangers, she was as full of free facts as the local library. She told me about the removable electrode packets—the sub-rosa bags—and how they were sewn to a volunteer's muscle tissue. The experiments ranged from isolating stress centers to disciplining body tissue for combat situations. At the Bethesda Naval and Plum Island outposts, implants were activated during the mating and birthing of several animal species. An advanced program was being conducted with the cooperation of a Brookhaven nuclear plant, but this information was privileged, even to Sam.

I coaxed Sam into giving me a brief tour of the facilities the next morning. She looked at me oddly, asked me why I hadn't gone through the proper channels. I explained offhandedly that she knew how it was; Forms 5 through 39 and a dozen years before the request was granted. She laughed. She knew the government well.

We met early the following morning, before the Saturday overtime crowd filed in. Most areas were abandoned, some doors locked. As she remarked on trivia surrounding each storeroom antechamber, I slipped two of the lifetime-battery operated implants into my purse. I went to the ladies room before we left and transferred them to my bra, as all purses and brief cases were checked in the lobby, even on a lazy Saturday.

Finding a surgeon was more difficult. I had to rent the last car on a lot and drive north on 270, to Frederick, MD, to meet a man a suburban clinic had recommended for unusual forms of surgery. It took my travel allowance and the coupling of two credit cards to appease the man. I asked if I could

remain conscious. He told me I didn't have much choice because he didn't employ an anesthesiologist. From his charming mien, I suspected he'd cracked Hippocrates' staff over his knee years ago.

At the end of an hour, I felt the hum of experimental batteries and the tautening of flesh as Dr. Anysumwilldo sewed my biceps shut.

It's February and the apartment around me hasn't gone anywhere. I can't hold down more than a part-time job, and I'm fired frequently from that. The landlady is a charitable spinster. At night, when I'm awake and sometimes wailing, she lets herself in and gives me some of the painkillers she's been addicted to for forty years. I accept the pills, but that's all. She doesn't know I store them in a shoe box.

Sometimes the spasms are so bad, I writhe, teeter, and fall off the bed. It's all part of the process, I suppose. I can't relent and expect the implants to provide me with all the pain I require. Falling on my face in the bathroom, for instance, is always good for severe bruising; it beats stumbling down the stairs.

I don't think Nick ever had it so good. I wish he were around to ask.

I didn't tell him right away what I had done. Foolishly, I had forgotten he would notice the stitches. He couldn't believe what I'd done. I told him I had done it for him, that I wanted to understand his pain, court his deities.

He left that night.

I'll go back to Chicago sometime soon, after I've had the implants removed. Maybe then Nick will take me back; I'm sure he will. We're two of a perfect pair; he has to understand that, as I now understand each moment of his life.

For now, I'll endure, because there's so much left to cast out. When I've completely smothered apparitions of euphoria, I'll go back. I will.

The pen falls away from me, again. I won't pick it up this time because I'm finished. I'll lie down and listen to my biceps for a while. They sing to me when I listen closely. It's a strange song, with a voice and, when I close my eyes, a form.

Nick doesn't know it, but he's in here, split between each implant. I can sleep now. I'm not alone.

Someone is singing to me.

H. Andrew Lynch has sold stories to several publications, including *Grue*, *Noctulpa*, *New Blood*, and *EOTU*. The story in *EOTU* has been nominated for a 1991 Pushcart Prize. Recently, he completed his second novel, an action thriller entitled *Hero Killer*.

Wayne Allen Sallee's fiction has appeared in *Grue*, *Cemetery Dance*, and literally hundreds of other small press magazines. This year he sold four stories and one non-fiction article to *Penthouse Letters & Forum*. His short fiction will appear in *Borderlands 2*, *Slashers*, *Years Best Horror XIX*, and *Freddy Krueger's Seven Sweetest Dreams*. His first novel *The Holy Terror* will be out in early 1992. When he's not writing, he wanders aimlessly and usually takes the same route.

A Certain Slant of “I”

by S. P. Somtow

Theology for Secular Humanists

In my last couple of columns I talked about distant lands and exotic climes--demons in Bangkok--farting in England--shamanism in Southern California. I thought I'd spend time in this, the third issue of the ever-more-popular *Iniquities*, to discuss profound philosophical problems a little closer to home. Having recently escaped -- by about 1/10th of a second -- being crushed to death by a hit and run driver, I've been spending a lot more time recently meditating about death, and about the transience of existence.

Not that I don't think about death all the time--after all, I am a horror writer!--but I generally only think about other people's, not my own. And anyway the death we horror writers deal with is metaphorical; as with the tarot card named Death, we use death to mean transformation as often as we use it to mean actual, physical, one-way-ticket death.

The other main component of literature--indeed, all art--is, of course, sex. Sex and death are what it's all about, and the thing that disturbs people most about horror--the thing that stands most in the way of its respectability as a literary genre--is the fact that in the horror medium we are able to actualize the equation of sex and

death in a far more blatant way than can be done in other literary fields.

Of course, writers whose works are not generally relegated to the ghetto of horror can be just as blatant as any of us. One has only to examine the works of Shakespeare to find such sentiments as the following, from *Romeo and Juliet*:

*"O happy dagger,
This is thy sheath! There rust,
and let me die."*

Bearing in mind that, in 16th Century English, the word "die" had the double meaning of having an orgasm, we can see that Shakespeare's really being pretty damn blatant about how Juliet's suicide is really all about the equation of sex and death. Of course, if one of the modern splatterpunkers had been writing this scene, he might have phrased it something like this:

"Looking at that dagger reminded Juliet of Romeo's throbbing dick inside her, pumping her until she was ready to explode with ecstasy. 'Give it to me, baby!' she murmured. 'Fuck me until I'm swallowed up in the great big lubricious cunt of death!'"

Or--to take another example from

that endless *comucopia* of examples--how about the scene where Othello strangles Desdemona, then crawls toward her hapless corpse for one last kiss?

*"I kissed thee ere I killed thee.
No way but this:
Killing myself, to die upon a
kiss."*

Once again, the old bard really knew that sex and death go together as surely as do "things" and Coke. I imagine, if one of the present bards of gore were to write this scene, it would go something like this:

"Othello cradled Desdemona in his arms. Rigor mortis had not yet set in, and she flopped in his muscular embrace like a Cabbage Patch doll that had seen too much service in the marital aid industry. 'I done killed you dead, white bitch,' he crooned huskily, 'but now I know you didn't screw around with no motherfucking Italian captain. Well, you dead, and there ain't nothing I can do about it now. But just looking at you, lying there, with your baby mouth all soft, it sure do make me horny. Oh, baby, let me come on you one more time. Yeah, let me come all over you and you don't even have to move, 'cause Othello he



Bob Gwiaz

Slant of "I"

about ready to croak herself."

Perhaps it should be explained to any of the "loud" horror writers who happen to be reading this article that I am not, of course, parodying any of them individually—just creating a kind of "virtual reality" hypothetical horror writer of somewhat limited literacy—in order to demonstrate that the passage from the sublime to the ridiculous is not a quantum but a continuum—that all of us, from the Master on down, deal with the sex and death thing in ways that go all the way from the transcendently metaphorical to the messily physical.

I started thinking very seriously about sex and death one day a couple of weeks ago when a friend of mine, a teenage kid who occasionally hangs around my house, started asking me some serious questions about it. It must be noted that this kid doesn't usually draw me into philosophical discussions; he's generally more interesting in such teenage preoccupations as "scamming," "racking," and "tagging," which, to the best of my knowledge, may be roughly translated for those over thirty as "heavy petting," "shoplifting," and "writing on walls." Today, though, he was inclined to be serious, and he came right out and asked me (as the resident guru of the house), "Somtew, why do people believe things that are so obviously bullshit?"

"What do you mean?" I said. "Have you decided to take up a career in politics or something?"

"No, I don't mean like, the P.T. Barnum kind of thing, putting things over on people, selling them snake oil... I mean like, the Bible and shit. I mean, how could someone live in the belly of a fish? How could like, people really believe that these naked dudes talked to a snake and ate an apple and ended up getting kicked out of the celestial Club Med by a dude with a white beard? I just don't understand. These things are just totally not true, and yet people just believe them and you can't argue with 'em."

Well, one thing was clear: Alex must have been spending the weekend with his deeply religious grandparents, and it wasn't really my place to countermand their solicitude for the poor boy's soul. But the problem of faith was not the only thing his question set me thinking about.

Most of the horror writers I know are not fundamentally religious people. Some of them may believe in something,

but they are also people who like to question, who are always into challenging the bases of their own beliefs; if not atheists, they tend to be at the very least agnostics. And yet the imagery of religion—its metaphoric content—not only Judeo-Christian but also that of more ancient or more exotic religions—figures very prominently indeed in the work of horror writers. This is especially true in the case of supernatural horror, since the supernatural presupposes a supernatural cosmology, and that cosmology is necessarily buttressed by the trappings of religion. Vampires and werewolves come replete with Catholic paraphernalia; so, at a second remove, do zombies, since the voodoo that creates them is a West African religion seen through the distorting lens of Catholicism. Satan goes around fucking innocent women and engendering the Antichrist so frequently in fiction that his multitudinous offspring threaten to outnumber the extant fragments of the true cross.

But even in psychological or realistic horror, there is a tendency toward demonization, so that the terror the reader feels at the exploits of some serial killer or bogeyman often becomes a supernatural terror—a religious terror.

Why, if horror writers don't generally, as a class, subscribe to Judeo-Christian (and other) mythological systems? And why are many readers willing to accept these systems as true, at least temporarily, during the course of a work of fiction, even if they'd never in a million years set foot in a church, and have surely never considered the theological ramifications of original sin?

As I said, I didn't want to upset the kid's grandparents, so I decided to try to steer the conversation into calmer waters. "Alex, those stories are true," I said. "But there's more than one kind of truth."

"What do you mean?" he said.

I could see that there really were no calm waters in this particular sea, but I was still trying to avoid religious controversy. Muttering a secret prayer to St. Bruno Bettelheim, I said, "Fairy tales, for instance. They use a language of symbols to tell us truths about ourselves that sometimes we're not ready to face if someone just told them to us bluntly. You may not think Little Red Riding Hood is true, but in a very real sense, it is."

"Huh?" he said, mystified.

"Well, think of a girl who's just had her first period. She's starting to think

all kinds of exciting and frightening new thoughts about sex. The red riding hood she's wearing shows us she's going through puberty, because it's the color of blood... and the dark forest is—"

"Oh my God," said this fourteen-year-old boy, who only required one little hint to see the whole picture vividly. "It's about her father, isn't it? The wolf, I mean. She thinks he's gonna rape her or something. And he tricks her into getting into bed with him, and—"

I marveled at Alex's ability to see right through to the core of this fairy tale. I'd only shown him the first stepping stone, but he'd managed to figure out the whole thing: that this children's story explains, in symbolic terms, an all-too-common domestic situation, and, by making the girl victorious and restoring the grandmother to life, it also shows the girl that she can and will wander off the beaten path one day ... when she's ready.

"No one ever told me this before," Alex said, "thanks." I thought I was off the hook, but he went on, "But that was only a fairy tale, and nobody really believes those literally anyway. Come on, dude, you're like, evading the issue. Tell me why Adam and Eve is true and then I'll stop bugging you and go back to playing Tetris on my Gameboy."

"So tell me what you think is wrong with the story of Adam and Eve," I said. I didn't want to launch into an explanation of how most biblical scholars believe that two different authors are responsible for the first eleven chapters of Genesis. "P," the boring one, wrote Chapter One, transcribing it almost word for word from the Babylonian creation myth, and specifically saying that God made lots of men and women all at once; "J," who wrote the story of Adam and Eve, had a more poetic view of the universe. (One controversial new theory attempts to prove that "J" was a woman.) But I didn't think that academic theories would really help this young man's dilemma, which was the old Socratic problem of the nature of truth.

"Well," he said, "apart from the fact that it's bullshit anyway—I mean, I do know about evolution—how could it be true that God would kick these dudes out of paradise just for making a dumb mistake that anyone would make? And just because they made that mistake, we're like all full of sin and have to be saved by Jesus, even though I sure never had a bite of that apple? If God really existed, he wouldn't be such

a dick." (Alex was, without knowing it, quoting almost directly from Euripides.)

I thought about something my friend and collaborator, Brian Yuzna (who directed *Bride of Re-Animator*) frequently talks about. He's really fascinated by the fact that amoebae don't have sex, and they don't die. An amoeba version of *Re-Animator* would probably be pretty dull.

So I said, "Well, think, Alex. You're stuck in a beautiful garden with everything you could possibly want. You're there for all eternity with the most beautiful girl in the world, and she's always naked. All you have to do is not eat the apple to stay there forever. What would you do?"

"What use is a naked girl if I don't even know she's naked?"

"Exactly. Do you remember what was in the apple?"

"Knowledge."

"And if you knew she was naked,

what would you do?"

"I'd fuck her," he said.

"You've just explained the whole story," I said. "People have this burning need to know things. Not just mad scientists, everybody. And the price of knowledge is sex--and death. It's human to want to know things, and it's human to want to make love, and it's human to die. Before they ate the apple, they weren't really human, because they didn't have those things. The story doesn't say that it's a bad thing to be driven from the Garden of Eden. It celebrates the fact that human beings want to know the truth and are willing to pay the price. It's a story that describes what it's like to be a human being. I mean, let's face it--what would you do if you were living in a perfect place, and your parents did everything for you, and you got everything you wanted, and you'd never grow old ... as long as you had to stay in that one place forever?"

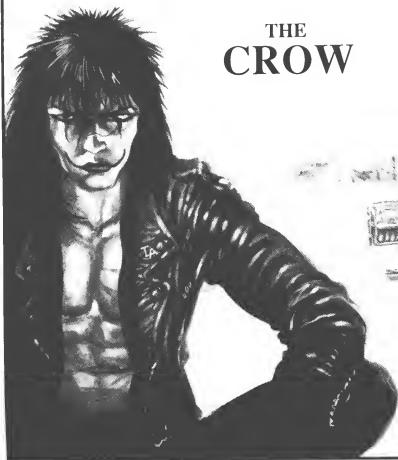
"Shit! I'd leave."

"Exactly. Sooner or later you have to give up being a child. You have to learn that your parents aren't perfect. You have to grow up and leave home."

I saw something that pleased and moved me greatly then: I saw the light of understanding in Alex's face, and I realized that he would never again dismiss those Bible stories as untrue.

And that, I realized, is also true of all us horror writers who profess a certain militant and iconoclastic irreligiosity. We continue to draw on the imagery of those very systems of belief which, we loudly claim, have lost their power over us. But they have not. Horror fiction is, at root, a profoundly religious genre--perhaps the most religious of all branches of literature--and it speaks to that gut sense of awe, that pre-logical child within, the only part of us that still sees the universe in terms of absolute good and evil.

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